

# DEATHCREATOR

BOOK TWO: THE DARK MARCH

EXPLICIT



BY JOHN DOMUS CRUO

## **Synopsis from Deathcreator Book One: A Flesh Golem's Ascension**

John awakens in a cave to find that he can't move. He knows instinctively that someone is trying to hurt him. He eventually breaks free of his state and kills the person responsible. He attempts to flee the cave, only to be pulled back by a malevolent force. His body once again acts against his intentions. He finds the force to be the Book of Souls, a soul-hungry tome that only has one purpose. To feed its God souls by enticing people to read it and voluntarily give their souls for the knowledge inside.

In his rage, his soul ignites, and for the first time he feels the Dark God's presence as it helps him absorb the book.

To John's horror, the book isn't dead and is instead speaking to him from his mind. It attempts to subdue him but ultimately fails. As a result it provides him with memories and creates an amusing avatar called the Book-Fairy.

As the Book-Fairy describes what John can do, he feels something is off. The Book-Fairy provides a sloppy recreation of mishmashed RPG elements and begins to force limits on John's powers, only unlocking things in exchange for souls.

It generates thinly veiled commands that it labels quests, and sends John out to hunt souls.

John leaves the cave and is ambushed by goblins. He kills them as lamely as possible and collects their souls. It's then that he hears screaming from the wall behind him. He finds a flaming head that he had previously labeled as Bob and takes that soul as well. He then takes what's left of the man that tried to subjugate him earlier.

The fairy explains Fleshcrafting and soul infusion, and John tries it out with Bob and the necromancer who tried to bind him. They both come alive as action figure sized creatures and Bob gets his revenge against the man who killed him and made him a torch so long ago. As a reward to John, Bob

gives him his spells even though they are mostly eaten away from having his soul consumed as a torch.

John then absorbs the skills and spells of the necromancer he named Dipshit. Dipshit was apparently a high level-tailor and a low level necromancer.

As he sits in the dark cave, he starts to realize just how alone he is and decides to bring Bob back. He creates a gargoyle-esque body for him out of a portion of goblin flesh and gives it bone spikes.

John is still feeling lonely and realizes that Bob probably feels the same. John decides to make a mate for Bob first out of the Soul of a Timid Goblin. During this process his mind wanders to the Book-Fairy and how she seems to be able to do more then she lets on but refuses to. When he confronts her, she shows her true colors and once again tries to take control of his body.

John and the Book of Souls begin a battle where each is attempting to consume the other. The Dark God reacts in rage at the thought of an inferior God trying to control him and aids John in consuming the Book of Souls.

John isolates the Book itself and converts it to mana while sparing the other souls the same fate. As a result of that the souls run amok inside of him, each vying for control of his body. John creates Mors, his own fairy. She is a combination of him, the Dark God, and the souls that sided with John. She quickly gets everything under control. and John once again opens his eyes.

He finds a black liquid has leaked from his eyes and he crushed the female creature he had made to be Bob's companion.

He mends her and has Mors teach her English. The small female opens her eyes and smiles at him as he names her Lina.

Time goes on and he makes both her and Bob clothes because he notices she seems uncomfortable being nude. Against his better judgment, he starts to feel attracted to

her but knows that it's impossible and fears betraying his friend. He doesn't know, however, that she feels the same about him.

John, feeling frustrated, decides to make a mate for himself. He takes the soul from a highly intelligent mythical bird known as the paradise falcon and combines it with a lusty goblin girl after getting their consent.

The Paradise Falcon was a prized creature, as its heart could be used as a soul prison and its feathers could regenerate mana if worn. However, because her species was so rare, she had lived a lonely life, never seeing another of her kind after her first migration. John felt her loneliness and depression, and the two of them connected as she was finally able to talk to someone.

The goblin girl had been one of the two goblins that tried to kill him earlier, but after speaking with her he realized that she was an honest outgoing person with a killer libido. Something about her enthusiasm and charm made him want to save her.

After combining them, he puts them into a body he and Mors created, and Leera is born.

Leera has a lithe frame, long black hair and beautiful Asian eyes. When she sees John, the two are instantly drawn to each other, as now neither is lonely.

Bob tries to make his move on Lina only to find that she seems agitated. Bob and Lina have a long talk and she confesses that she isn't attracted to him and instead wants John. Bob is saddened but realizes that both she and John are important people to him and gives her his support.

The morning after, John introduces Leera to Bob and Lina, but for some reason everyone feels tired. John chalks it up to having a long night and falls asleep while cuddled up with Leera and Lina.

Mors awakens him suddenly, informing him he has died! He opens his eyes to see a creature enter the caves casting everyone in a sickly yellow light. He finds out it's a wendigo

and consumes its soul, but Bob is mostly eaten, and everyone is dead. He begins to freak out and Mors reminds him he can use the calming effect. He thinks things through and takes their souls inside himself.

He rebuilds Lina first as she was still on his chest, but he soon realizes he can't fight his attraction for her and in a moment of lust he upgrades her body using parts of the wendigo and the paradise falcon. Lina opens her eyes in a strange predicament and discovers she is now more of a harpy. She passes out for 'reasons' and John rebuilds Leera giving her back some of her feathers, creating strands of red and white in her raven black hair.

He has a conversation with Bob in soul form and tells him about everything that happened. Bob says he wants a truly dangerous body, not the impish one he had before. John feels guilty about his feelings for Lina, and Bob eases his mind, telling him Lina is like a little sister to him.

Lina wakes up and dashes out of the cave in embarrassment for her earlier actions as John and Leera begin to get intimate.

Lina ends up getting hit with an arrow as she realizes John's intentions. She has a desperate fight with a small goblin and drags it back into the cave where she sees John and Leera. In a strange mix of emotions she runs to them and they all finally become one as they mend her.

Some time later John cradles the sleeping Lina and decides to go out to hunt large game in order to make Bob a new body. He binds the small goblin on his way out and wonders why Lina left him alive.

He and Lina find a pair of monstrous bears and John decides these will be perfect. After a brief struggle he kills one, and he and Lina go back to the cave only to find the small goblin crying on Leera's shoulder.

They all talk and they figure out that it was the son of the two goblins John had killed earlier — the same ones whose souls were now inside of Leera and Lina. John feels guilt

over the fact that he is the reason this goblin child is now an orphan and explains everything to him. The child looks at Lina and Leera and cries, not sure if he's happy his parents are still alive or sad that they aren't the same. John makes him a bone spike of his own and tells the child he may visit whenever he wants.

As the child leaves, he warns John about the dangerous predators that come out at night.

John decides that he needs to get the other bear quickly before one of these dangerous beasts gets them. He also considers that it would be a bonus if he could get one of them as they may provide him with better materials.

Bolstered by his ease at dispatching the bear earlier, he foolishly sets out alone and comes face to face with the reason you shouldn't travel at night.

A large creature rips John apart like a paper doll, and John just barely manages to subdue the beast as he is being eaten by it.

John gains some new abilities and improved senses that allow him to travel more safely through the forest and he decides that it doesn't matter how long it takes to get back he just needs to stay alive.

He drags both the massive sha'dwarg and the bear back through the woods avoiding any unfamiliar smells until he comes to a tree that stands out well above the rest. He stops to admire it and is greeted by a dryad.

He's had a rough night and isn't in the mood for her song and dance, especially after she tries to kill him. He leaves her and she yells back that he should come visit her again.

As he approaches his cave he smells dust and rot, two things that aren't normally smells of the forest.

He investigates to find a pair of necromancers within earshot of his cave. He uses his new abilities to listen in on their conversation and determines that they seem reasonable, and mostly normal.

He makes a plan to talk first and lead them away from his cave if things got bad. That way at least the girls had a chance.

After talking with them he reveals everything that happened with Dipshit and the book of souls. The necromancers won't back down however without something to take back to their academy to assuage their leader, Eunice.

John finds out their names: the older one is Barzealis, and the masked one is Ralphus. Barzealis dies in a coughing fit and rises again as a lich. John is impressed, but Ralphus seems unfazed and speaks only of the downsides, like no more food or women. John is struck with inspiration and decides to fleshcraft Barzealis a new body over his lich frame.

After he finishes, Barzealis is overjoyed and hastily retreats as if afraid John will take his body back. Ralphus approaches John and tells him he will bring him gifts and necessities in exchange for what he did today. He also gives John a piece of amber and tells him he has a favor for him later.

John sighs a breath of relief as he drags the bodies to the cave, and his long night is over. He rebuilds Bob using both the body of the wendigo and the sha'dwarg. Bob gains what he wanted as he now dwarfs John in size. He looks like a demonic version of the sha'dwarg with enhanced rear legs from the monstrous bear and horns from the wendigo.

After some rest, John decides that he needs to investigate these strange pulling sensations he's been feeling, as well as secure the area around his cave. After thinking about how best to do this, he decides to ask the dryad, as she has likely been in this forest for as long as her tree.

John asks his questions about what things are in the areas around here and the world, but she refuses to answer without payment. He agrees and she tricks him, once again trying to kill him.

She drains a great deal of his mana and blood but becomes drunk on it. He now knows she's a threat so he drags her

away from her tree, expecting that she would turn to wood once more but to his surprise she's fine.

He discovers she can Fleshcraft her and imbues all his abilities into her. He also gives her the ability to generate her own mana so she won't have to leech it off of others to live.

He walks away, but she doesn't move. He grudgingly decides to take her back to the cave because even though she deserves it, he doesn't want her to die.

The next day he decides to ride Bob to that pulling sensation. He doesn't tell Leera or Lina because he doesn't want them to worry about him. Bob runs at a tremendous speed, stopping only to eat fluffy forest dwellers to recharge, and they make it there by nightfall.

They both stare at a large camp filled with armed men. John realizes this is a dangerous situation but believes they may be soldiers. Filled with both the hope that he has finally found civilization and that he can finally see what that feeling was he makes a plan with Bob and enters the camp. He notices that something is off about the men as they jeer and heckle him and immediately realizes that these aren't soldiers.

Their leader, a cocky blonde man approaches him and introduces himself as Thads as he holds his hand out in friendship. John is skeptical but shakes the man's hand only to be stabbed through the heart.

He throws the man down and returns his dagger by skewering through the man's foot. He calls to Bob and they both massacre the bandit camp under cover of heavy fog. During the carnage Thads escapes and John opens the tent he came out of only to see a limbless girl covered in her own blood. John soothes her as the Dark God embraces him. He finds some of the men responsible and lets them experience what she did. He uses their parts to restore her, and she tells him about what she's been through. She tells him she prayed for him to come and it all clicks. He was



answering a prayer made to the Dark God. He then speaks to the souls of the bandit's victims inside of him as he shows them what happened to their captors and the restored girl sleeping soundly beside him.

As he interviews the souls he finds that not all their victims were human. He sees a family of four goblins. After the child that visited his cave earlier, he now knew that goblins weren't evil beasts but honest people just trying to survive.

The goblins tell him of their experience, how the children were burned alive as the father watched, then they burned him. The girl was tied and decapitated. Like all the victims, they were found in the cesspool in the latrine.

As he's thinking death is too easy for these men, John remembers how to make a human torch. He and Bob mount each and every head on a pike, and he brings them all back as torches to burn away in agony.

The young girl, Roscia, wakes and dances among the torches and John shares the scene with the other victims.

He then restores them all. A blonde girl in her late teens, a pair of sisters with fluffy black hair, a red haired child not even in her teens and a tall painfully skinny elvish woman.

He gives them all enhanced bodies and mana generation but leaves out life sense and bone spikes because he wants them to be able to return to their families and have a normal life.

The girls all go play with Bob and Roscia as Bob gives them rides around the camp. The elvish woman however loses interest quickly and speaks with John. John is giddy at the fact he has finally met a fantasy race that wasn't trying to kill him and asks to touch her ears. He doesn't know that elves are relieved and hated here. She moves her golden hair and allows him, it's the first time in her life that someone was happy to see her, and the first time someone had touched her ears in a friendly way. As she felt that warmth and acceptance she blushed. John took it as making her uncomfortable and stopped but she asked to watch him

work. She wanted to stay near him, the man who brought her back and accepted her.

She asks him about himself and finds out he is made of several different things. For some reason she's stuck on satyr. John dismisses it and continues restoring the goblins.

He thought back to what Lina had said about her new body and decided to do the same thing for these goblins. He asked Mors to make 'handsome and attractive super-goblins.' Mors did so and he infused their souls back into their bodies.

The female goblin, however, was extremely well built and as he hugged her he had a reaction. Little did he know that she was the chief's daughter and was having a reaction of her own. As he stood he accidentally marked her, which in goblin culture was the same as proposing.

She had never been interested in males before, they were all too weak. She didn't want to stain her body by bringing unfit offspring from someone she could never admire into the world. But she knew John was powerful. He had killed an entire camp and brought her and her family back from death itself. He had showed compassion to a goblin. That was something unheard of in these times and now he marked her. A man this powerful wanted her to be his. She felt overwhelmed and attacked him.

The former chief explained to the very confused John what had happened and no matter how John tried to justify it he knew he would be lying to himself. So he took his third mate in a tent and named her Nex.

He then named the chief Reginald right before Reginald relinquished his position to John. John now had a tribe waiting for him. He felt confused and taken aback by how quickly this all happened, but he couldn't dwell on it. He still had work to do.

When he was interviewing the souls he had found two redeemable men and he intended to give them bodies. He

made them Oni, from a Japanese story that stuck with him. One red, one blue, and both huge.

Before he was done with them, however, a strong pulling sensation hit him. It was coming from the young goblin that had visited the cave. Leera and Lina's child from another life. John called to Nex and told her of the peril in her village. John knew the direction to go, but couldn't risk obstacles like rivers, mountains or towns that could be in the way, so Nex and Reginauld got busy figuring out the best route to take. He finished his work on the Oni and had them swear their loyalty to him.

He then called for Bob and asked him to take the girls back to their homes. Roscia protested and wanted to stay with John, but he sent her away. Liz also asked to stay, but John told her she would be a burden in the fight to come. She then showed him an impressive display of magic as log-sized ice spears cut paths of destruction through the forest. John used the amber he had been saving and infused it with the wendigo's soul. Liz Fleshcrafted a staff, and John finished it with the amber. Liz was now able to create massive ice structures with devastating effects.

John was impressed but he still didn't want to take her. He wanted her to have a normal life from here on out, not to be dropped into a life or death battle.

Liz felt a familiar sensation again; it was rejection. John had given her everything she was denied her entire life, and now he was taking it all away. Taking himself away...from her.

She told him about her life and how this bandit thing was just the icing on top of more than forty years of suffering. She had starved in the streets, been raped, robbed and beaten all because of her ears. Until him, she didn't even have any of the elves' famed magic. She told him that asking her to go back was the same as asking her to die. She stabbed the staff into the ground and turned her back. John had done something worse than hurting her; he had given her hope then in an instant taken it away again.

John rushed to her. He felt her body in his arms as he hugged her. A life of starvation and desperation on the streets had not been kind. She was little more than a skeleton with skin on it. He agreed to take her with him if she consented to allow him to Fleshcraft her into a stronger form.

She did, and he knew she was another person he couldn't be separated from. He turned her into a deer-centaur to increase her speed and ensure she could get away if all else failed, and soon they were off to the goblin village.

When they got there the bandits had already killed most and were roasting the survivors as they drank and reveled in the suffering they were inflicting.

John swore that the young child would be his son and set about avenging him. He murdered most of the bandits himself while Liz and Nex killed to their heart's content in the woods. He freed the surviving goblins and started roasting the bandits. He gave to goblins their ale and as they watched their tormentors burn he restored the boy. He gave him a body not unlike his and named him Athen when he adopted him.

Elsewhere Bob took the girls to their town only to find that the town didn't welcome them back. Instead it was trying to kill them. Bob tracked down the three girls that returned and mauled their butcher, but it was too late to save the older of the two sisters. Bob wrapped her head, grabbed the rest of the girls and set off to the cave.

John awakens to Bob giving him the severed head of one of the girls he just saved. Now filled with anger John walks off toward the goblin village with a mission in mind.

## Chapter 1: Restoration - John

I almost forgot the older sister's head. I moved back and picked it up. I looked into her sad, dead eyes as I felt the black liquid pour from me.

*How could they do this to you! Who the hell do they think they are? After you've been through so much, they reduce you to a head.* I hadn't planned to do anything to the human village. I was just going to rebuild things here and make my home with the goblins, but now I want that human village gone.

They allowed this to happen to all these girls. They even butchered them after they returned with dreams of seeing family again. *I'm sorry, girls, but you won't have a normal life now. I won't trust anyone else with your well-being. I will take care of you, I will adopt you, and at the very least you will live.*

I used Soul Steal.

The older girl's soul flew into me. I closed my eyes. She was there, looking just as she had the first time: limbless and missing an eye. All this must have shocked her back to that point in her life. It's tragic, but this may be her strongest memory of herself. I willed myself towards her and knelt down to hug her. She cried and sputtered through broken teeth, but as I ran my fingers through her thick black hair, her body stopped shaking and the sobs slowly subsided.

I held her close. "You're going to be my daughter now. Forget what happened. For you, a thing like death is only an illusion. No matter where you go or how it happens, just think of me. Will me to be by your side, and I will know. I will find you, and I will bring you back."

I felt arms close around my neck and looked down to see her form restored. Tears still shone on her cheeks, but she wasn't crying anymore now. I wiped her face and thought I saw a hint of a smile.

She looked back up at me and spoke. "You're adopting me? Why? You don't even know my name."

Though her questions were harsh, her voice seemed happy. I could tell her logic was waging a battle with her heart and her skepticism wouldn't allow her to accept kindness without a reason. Liz had educated me on that. In this world, someone only does you a favor if they get something in return. Women have it especially hard, as they are often treated as property.

"I don't need to justify myself, and I don't need a reason to be me. I didn't bring you back for you to end up this way. I won't allow you to die! I forbid it — as your father," I replied firmly.

Her smile finally came out as more tears fell. She spoke. "My name is Belairia, and my sister's name is Celairia. We're named after the two brightest stars in the sky, the north one and the south one."

The blackness transformed into a clear night sky, and the stars illuminated the darkness as she pointed them out.

"This one is me." She pointed to the brightest star. "And this one is Celairia," she said as she pointed to the second brightest.

No one has ever changed the darkness before, I realized, except me when I replay memories. She must have a high affinity for dark and soul magic.

I felt a smile creep onto my face as I spoke. "They're both beautiful, just like you and your sister. My name is John, as you know, but from here on, you'll call me Father. I am your keeper from this day forth; you are my daughter and disciple. You also get a cool brother and several awesome moms."

I ruffled her hair and stood up. She stood, as well.

"The next time we meet, it will be on the other side. Do you have any requests for your body?" I asked.

"No, I want to stay looking this way for my sister. It'll remind me that we're still family," she responded.

I nodded and closed out of the soul screen. I opened my eyes and realized that I was hugging her head to my chest. It was so strange; I had just been speaking with her while she was alive and talking, but now... I looked down at the head with its sad expression. *It will be a challenge to not slaughter that village.*

Liz trotted up beside me with Nex on her back. *It's like I have my first cavalry unit.* Liz looked at what I was cradling.

"No, that isn't...?" Her teal eyes started to moisten.

"Yeah, it is. Her own family did this to her. I'm her family now, and this won't happen again," I replied.

We all walked together into the goblin village. They were all asleep in a pile. I counted the sleeping goblins; there were about twelve if you didn't include Athen, Nex and her family. Did their number grow? I seem to remember fewer last night.

The oni were eating the charred fat man. They stopped mid-chew as I approached and sat up into a kneeling position.

"It's alright men, resume eating," I said, and they nodded and sat back down.

I could see a few wounds on their bodies, but no blood. I took that to mean my armor experiment worked.

"Okay, Athen, Bob and Liz. I need you all to go into the forest and gather up the bandits' bodies. Nex and family, start pairing bandit bodies with goblin bodies. Place the smaller bandits by the females and the larger ones by the males. Any partial pieces should be assembled near the children and the infants," I commanded.

They all started to move out except Liz, who pulled me in for a quick kiss before disappearing with a rush of wind.

I found an average-sized bandit and sat Belairia's head beside him. I stripped him nude and began fleshcrafting.

This time I knew that it didn't matter if the girls were normal or not. I wouldn't reject them. I condensed and formed the body into Belairia's form.

"Mors, help me out here please."

Mors took control once more. She was even faster this time, as she had crafted this body before.

Soon I was looking down at my new daughter. I used blend and imparted all traits. Her eyes had changed from a dark brown to an olive green. As I looked at them, I decided that they actually looked fairly natural that way.

I decided that having a nude teenage girl around a bunch of goblin males was a bad idea, so this time I would dress her before bringing her back. I found a shirt and belt and began to put it on her, but a leather apron caught my eye.

I knew I could fleshcraft animal skin, but could I do it with tanned leather?

I began fleshcrafting it. It was extremely laborious, as it didn't move as quickly as skin. I decided I would turn it into a top to save time. I crafted it into a simple sleeveless top and placed it on the girl over her shirt. I wasn't even going to try to put the pants on her, as that would be unnecessarily difficult, and she was more or less covered.

I laid the pants down next to her and infused her soul back into her body.

She sat up with a smile and stretched as if just waking up.

She threw her arms around me and kissed my cheek.

"Welcome back, Belairia," I said.

She hugged me close and replied, "Thank you, father."

I felt myself smiling as I ruffled her hair again, and we both stood up.

"There's a pair of pants right there if you want them," I told her.



She reached down and began putting them on as I turned my back to give her some privacy.

I looked around and noticed that several of the goblins had woken up and were watching us. *Ah, shit, I guess I need to announce her as my daughter.*

I turned around as she was tying her pants on and grabbed her hand to lead her to the group of goblins.

"This my daughter, Belairia. No gobs mark her unless beat her in fight," I announced in goblin.

As the male goblins started to stand, she shot me a confused, worried look. I needed to toughen her up, and her body was now stronger than several men put together. If she was going to be my daughter, she would need to be strong.

"I told them that they can't make you their wife without beating you in a fight. It looks like they took it as a challenge. In the end as the chief's daughter, you still have the final say. You just won't like how they propose," I answered her unasked questions with a slight smile.

Of course I wouldn't be letting them mark her, but it was important that she toughened up. This way she could fight without any real consequences. I wanted her to be independent one day and have a family of her own. That wouldn't happen if I let her rely on me for everything. I needed to set the tone for her future and let her realize that she'd have to fight to survive.

"How am I going to beat them? What the void have you gotten me into?" she said nervously.

"You may not have realized it, but you're a lot stronger now. This will likely be like an adult fighting toddlers. Just get over your fear and let loose a little."

I stepped away as four goblins came charging. Three watched as the first one jumped in, taking a wild swing at her. I knew she had increased perception of time, and as I expected, she casually dodged it while kicking the goblin

suitor in the chest. He went flying and landed about ten feet away in a heap.

The other three goblins looked at each other then at her. One goblin gave up and went back to sit with the other bystanders.

The second goblin started walking in circles around her, looking for an opening. She followed him with her head, only turning when he was out of sight. She closed her eyes and I could see something happening. A slight glow was emanating from under her eyelids. I knew immediately that it was life sense.

The goblin took this as an opening and charged in, trying to grab her. She brought her hands up and slammed her fists down on his back. He hit the ground with a labored gasp as the air was knocked out of his lungs.

She took a few steps backwards and opened her eyes. Just as I thought, they were glowing green. The last goblin suitor noticed and recoiled as if afraid. He slumped, walked back over to the others and sat down.

Reginauld got up and looked over to me. He nodded approvingly as he began to walk towards me.

Belairia saw him coming towards us and charged at him. He threw his hands up in a "halt" gesture as she rapidly closed the distance. She threw out a sweeping kick the moment she was in range.

Reginauld took a step back and pushed the back side of her foot, causing her to lose balance and fall over.

"My dear young lady, I was just going over to talk to John. Although you are quite beautiful, I am not interested in marking you." He held out a hand and she accepted, allowing him to pull her to her feet.

"I, I'm sorry, I got a little carried away," she said energetically.

I could already tell she was having fun. I went to see to the goblins she injured.

I walked to the one she had kicked like a soccer ball and used fleshcrafting to mend his injuries. He winced and sucked in air as I fixed his broken ribs. The other one had already gotten to his feet and rejoined the others.

"Thanks, God John," the goblin said as he bowed low to the ground. I pulled him up and dusted him off before gesturing for him to rejoin his friends.

Reginauld and Belairia walked over to me. As Belairia got closer, she started to run. She threw her arms out and leapt, catching me in a full-force hug. I caught her as we swung around.

"That was fun! Thank you, my strength is amazing!" she said as she squeezed tighter, damn near strangling me.

If she uses this much force on her future husband, he might die.

"I gave it to all of you. I won't trust you to the care of humans, and I won't allow any of you to be weak. You will all be my precious daughters; this world no longer has a claim on you. Beware though — after I upgrade these goblins, they will be as strong as you," I told her.

She actually smiled at that. "That's okay, I think I like fighting now."

I bent forward and let her down as Reginauld cleared his throat to get my attention.

"Thank you for keeping our traditions. That was actually quite shrewd of you. Now that she has proven to be the strongest female in the village, only the strongest males will challenge her. Keeping her safe from being mobbed by..." He leaned in and cupped his hand. I leaned down to hear what he was saying. "Does she know our mating customs?"

I whispered back, "No, I'm not really sure I should tell her, as it might spook her."

"You have to! What if someone beats her someday when you're not around? Some gobs just throw their loincloth at a female, but others throw the substance itself," he replied.

I fought the urge to gag. "Belairia, I may need to fill you in on some stuff."

I told her about goblin customs, including the marking and the public mating. She dry-heaved.

A strong look of determination snuck its way into her eyes as she began to speak. "Then that means I'm the strongest." I nodded and she continued. "I want it to stay that way. I won't let anyone treat me like a toy again." Her eyes glowed as rage played across her face.

"Reginauld, before this, you were the strongest, right?" I asked, and he nodded. "Is there any way you could go out to the clearing and train her for a while? Focus on unarmed combat and counters to common goblin tactics."

He nodded. "This brings back memories. It wasn't that long ago that I was doing this for Nex." He bowed to Belairia and gestured for her to follow him as he walked to a clearing.

I watched them for a while as they began fighting in the distance. They were moving at incredible speeds. I had no doubt that any of those strikes would knock out or even kill a normal person. When Belairia made a wrong move, Reginauld showed her what she had done wrong and taught her how to fix her movements.

"Mors, did you teach Reginauld Kung-Fu?"

I heard Mors's girlish chuckle in my head as she replied, "No, it's likely this is his own style that he has perfected over his twenty years of fighting. A goblin chief is always fighting other males to retain his rank."

Another voice entered my head.

"Hey! Promise to let him teach me how to fight, too."

"Threscia!?"

"Who else would it be? I got tired of waiting and decided to talk to you. I miss you and wanted to see how my sister was doing. But this is quite nice. You have to let him teach me when you finally build me a body."

"What the hell is happening here?" I asked, alarmed.

I felt a cold embrace once more. It seemed to be saying, *She is yours, now a part of you. She is also mine, and she can do as she pleases.*

"Mors? Did the elder god do something?"

"Yes, master. Threscia is technically a part of you and has unlimited access to everything, including your memories and powers, even physical control of your body at times. Think of her as another me," Mors replied.

"Threscia, what exactly did you do to the elder god?" I asked.

"I was starting to get really bored in the darkness with nothing to do, so I eventually began talking to it. To my surprise, it seemed to be listening. It showed me many things about you. When I asked if I could see you again, it brought me here. I've been delving into your memories and learning all I could about you. It breaks my heart to see your life in that horrible place. You are a god, a king, and everyone there just treated you like a nobody. Why were you so lonely? I think you deserved so much better," she replied with solemn sadness.

Mors chose this time to speak. "She will be useful to you, Master. Several of the souls willingly gave their skills to her, teaching her many long-dead forms of combat. Her affinity for dark magic is as high as a non-god could be, and she is an extremely clever girl. She even convinced an ancient Death Knight to teach her a spell from a lost form of magic. With her help, it's safe to say your ability to attack and defend is doubled."

I had no idea that souls could interact with each other, let alone teach or learn things. I guess Mors and Threscia are special, as they basically had the keys to the kingdom and could talk with anyone.

"What's it like in there? Is it like a soul city, or are all the souls isolated from each other?"

"Each of them is in their own space," Mors replied. "They have a rough idea of what you are doing but can only

communicate with me, Threscia, or on rare occasions the Dark God. Most of them are hibernating, reliving the times from when they were alive. Eventually, I think some of them will join with you directly, but I believe a lot of them don't want to lose their memories or are unsure about being absorbed. So far, though, they are all helpful and supportive of you — the ones that aren't terrified, at least."

"Is it possible for me to speak with this Death Knight?" I asked.

"Of course, but he is hibernating right now. He only seems to wake up for brief periods around midnight. There's something strange about him, but he was one of my first supporters after you created me. Before I had isolated all the souls in their own worlds, he actually defended me and helped the darkness subdue the rest. I wouldn't call him a good guy, but he will likely become your disciple at some point," she answered.

"Alright then, tonight I have a date with you, Threscia and this Death Knight," I told them as their voices faded away.

## Chapter 2: Happy Go Lucky Me - Sidney

I sat there next to a hastily scrawled note. It read: *Pardon my mess. Signed, the corpse in this room.*

I opened my mouth wide. I guess it would have been better to get a single-barrel shotgun, but I figured a double barrel one would get the job done twice as well. Also it was on sale. It's strange how I still think of money even though none of that will matter soon.

I had dipped the tips of the barrels in honey. The sweet taste of freedom awaited me as I pushed the barrels into my mouth. *They never tell you how awkward it is to kill yourself this way. Should I try to use my toe?*

*Ah... Caroline, soon I will see you again. I only hope you can forgive me. I never meant to...*

My doorbell rang.

I pulled the shotgun from my mouth. It had a horrible after-taste; maybe honey wasn't the right choice.

I laughed to myself, like the aftertaste mattered.

I walked to the door.

"Girl Scout cookies!" a young girl called cheerily.

I sighed to myself.

"Here." I handed her my wallet. "Take whatever is there; I want five-hundred boxes of mint-thins."

I slammed the door as she started to reply.

I sat back down and downed the rest of my bottle of Jack. *Ah, Jack, how I'll miss you. You've been my only friend for so long now, ever since I kicked the habit. But even you can't help me here.*

I placed the shotgun back into my mouth and began awkwardly toeing at the trigger.

*Ding-dong*

"God dammit!" I slammed the shotgun down and got to my feet. I stomped to the door. *I swear to god, if this isn't*

*important I'm going to kill them, then myself. Well, that last part is a given.*

I opened the door. There was a middle-aged woman with short fake-blonde hair.

"Just who do you think you are? You were so rude to my daughter! And just why on god's blessed earth did you give her your entire wallet?"

"I told her, five hundred boxes of mint-thins! Now get the fuck out of here, lady, I'm a little busy!"

She gasped in exaggerated offense and began berating me and threatening to call the cops.

I slammed the door.

I was this close to grabbing the bitch by her 'Can I speak to your manager' haircut, pulling her inside then skull-fucking her eye-socket until I came blood into her grey matter!

I sat back down, mournfully eyeing my empty bottle of Jack. *Oh well, this will all be over soon.* I placed the now spit riddled barrel back into my mouth. *Caroline, I...*

*Ding-dong*

I wish I had never bought that damn doorbell!

"Fucking shit! Fuck!" I got back up, but this time I took the shotgun with me. I hoped this lady was as much of a believer as she pretended to be because soon she would meet God firsthand. I sat my gun down as I opened the door.

"Jehovah's Witnesses! Have you found the glory of Jesus Christ?" A man stood before me wearing a fleece sweater and tight bicycle shorts.

I hadn't seen these guys in years. I didn't even know they still existed. Yet this asshole picks today of all days to knock on my door.

"No, where was the last place he looked?" I answered.

His face shifted from confusion to anger as he spoke. "I hope you go to Hell! I'm tired of..."

I slammed the door and grabbed my gun.



"This time, no more interruptions!" I plopped down and shoved the barrels into my mouth, chipping one of my teeth.

*Like I care at this point.*

I heard Tiny Tim's "Livin' in the Sunlight, Lovin' in the Moonlight" coming from the upstairs apartment along with the rhythmic smacking and squeaking noises that I recognized as my neighbor slamming his overweight college-aged step-daughter. They're at it a little early today.

*...Fuck it!*

I pulled the trigger and the taste blew my mind.

## Chapter 3: Goblin Upgrade - John

I left Belairia and Reginauld to train together and returned to the goblins. They were shooting me concerned glances as they watched their loved ones' remains being laid alongside the remains of their killers.

Bob and Liz were dragging in the bandits that had been killed in the forest as Nex was arranging them. Athen was separating out parts and pairing them with the young ones.

I cracked my knuckles and activated Soul Steal and Fleshcrafting. *It's time to get to work.*

"Mors, same as before; use their souls as templates for their bodies. We're making them the super-goblin versions like we did with Nex and Reginauld."

As Mors created their bodies, I transferred the skills of the bandit by them into their souls. I had Mors teach them all English. After I infused each one of them, I told them to gather the gear beside them and join the others.

The hours passed like minutes, and soon there were only scraps of flesh and mixed parts here and there where bodies had been. I kept all the bandit heads. My city would never need lights or fires. They would also serve as a reminder to those that saw them.

Mors generated a notification.

I closed my eyes to see it.

Fleshcrafting Level Up!

*Fleshcrafting Level 7: Fleshcrafting yourself is now almost instantaneous. You no longer have to be in direct contact with the object you are crafting and may Fleshcraft something at a distance of up to ten feet. Fleshcrafting time increases with distance, e.g. an object or person ten feet away would take time equivalent to Fleshcrafting Level One.*

Title Unlocked: God of Goblins!

"Was that really necessary, Mors?"

"Yes, Master, I thought you could use some cheering up."

"No one can see that but you and me."

"I can see it!" Threscia chimed in.

"And Threscia," I deadpanned.

"John?"

"Yes, my dear mental parasite?" I answered teasingly.

Threscia appeared in my vision.

"Dammit, woman, try to remember clothes. No matter what you say right now, all I'm going to be thinking about is... Well, nevermind that. Think of clothes."

I knew she was still very damaged and I didn't want to sexualize her, but women are my weakness, and I knew what this would all lead to if she kept appearing nude.

She smiled provocatively at me. "Something from your memory maybe?"

She manifested a goth outfit with a short skirt and fishnets, complete with dark eyeliner and thick mascara.

*Calm down, John, calm down.* I was paralyzed by a mixture of arousal and indignation. I had gone through a goth phase and still found that look to be stunning. She had full access to my memories and had chosen that look to elicit a very specific response. She was smart indeed and knew how to play me like a mandolin.

The sad part was it was working. Odds are that right now there is a large group of goblins just waiting for their god to say or do something profound, but all I'm doing is standing here with my eyes closed and a massive bulge in my pants.

Threscia smiled and I felt a hand untying my pants. It was *my* hand. I opened my eyes just in time to see a stunned bunch of handsome and beautiful super-goblins looking at me with a mix of reactions.

To my absolute horror, my hands began moving on their own, one hand gripping one twin, the other hand gripping the other.

"Goddammit, Threscia! What the hell is wrong with you!?" I screamed in my head.

My voice came unbidden to my lips as I spoke in words that weren't mine in a generic Dudley Do-Right voice. "Behold, the mighty two-dong John! Tremble at my girth and virility!"

"Threscia! Stop!" I was now yelling at her as she cackled like a madwoman.

This was giving me Book-Fairy flashbacks. I know she didn't mean any harm, but I couldn't allow this to continue.

So I did the only thing any real man would do.

"Mors! Help!"

Mors appeared and quickly pushed the gothic-themed Threscia out of my vision.

I regained control of my body.

There I stood, my pants around my ankles and my twins in hand with a large audience of goblins just looking at me with dumbfounded expressions. It didn't help things that some of the female goblins were almost Nex's equals in looks or that some of the men were now winking at me, including one grizzled-looking bearded goblin who was licking his lips.

Athen walked up to me and spoke. "Father, what're you doing?"

"Well, I wouldn't be giving you the full dad experience if I didn't embarrass you every now and then," I replied with a forced chuckle, my eye twitching.

He sighed and turned his back on me as a part of me died. I quickly pulled up my pants and swore I would get her back someday.

I looked around to see Bob laughing as he clapped slowly like a character in an '80s movie. Nex was as slack-jawed as her counterparts, and Liz was feverishly shaking her head as if trying to dismiss what she had seen as a dream. Both the oni seemed to be as mortified as me at all of this.

The red oni's eyes flashed with determination as he looked at me. His expression seemed to say, *I'll take on the burden of your shame.*

His muscles rippled as he stood. His eyes were daggers, and a feeling of immense seriousness permeated everything around him. Soon the goblins began to peel their eyes away from me to stare at his imposing presence.

He somehow turned even redder as he bent over and farted loudly for several seconds. The goblins near him had their hair blown back as the rest heaved and gagged.

He looked at me as a single tear flowed down his cheek. I mouthed the words, "Thank you!"

*I won't forget your sacrifice here today Red. You truly are a loyal man of honor.*

That was the single most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to me, and I think Red is traumatized. He hasn't moved in a while now and his eyes are staring into the distance unblinking as goblins point and laugh at him making farting noises.

I decided that to acknowledge it would be to exacerbate it. I instead began binding souls to matching heads.

Ah, yes. A magnificent chorus of wailing filled my ears.

I heard Threscia's voice. "I'm sorry," she said.

Was she ready to discuss what had been bothering me? Threscia had been acting out of character. When we merged that first time, I felt the depth of her soul. She was sad, determined and furious. I just couldn't figure out why she was acting this way now — silly and distant. Was it because she still lacked a body? I knew that was definitely part of it, but I felt like there was more to it than that. I think it's because I wasn't pursuing Thads and was instead helping the goblins and bolstering my tribe.

I knew I could make Threscia a body out of the remains here and at the bandit camp, but it just didn't feel right, and I could feel that sentiment echoed by the dark god. Threscia deserved something unique, something that could truly bring out her potential. Either way, I wanted her out of me before she pulled anymore stunts.

"That was mortifying. Do you have any idea just how much that affected me, let alone Red? He's just a husk of an Oni now," I replied as I opened my eyes and stared at Red.

The goblin youths were now taking turns farting in his direction and giggling. Red appeared to all the world to be a statue, a phantom of his former self. Blue was patting him on the shoulder as if to console him.

"Oh wow, this sucks. I just felt so frustrated. It was good to have power, to feel in control for once in my life. It was only supposed to be a stupid joke. Why did things have to become so real?" she said distractedly.

"It's all real. Everything here is all *too* real. When I first noticed I was in a fantasy world, I was overjoyed. I thought to myself, 'Hey, this is the escape you've dreamed of,' but now I have come to realize that I am a player in this game and everything I do here affects someone else. Your fun cost me my dignity. That's not so bad, but Red lost some honor. To people like him, honor is akin to life itself. I have no doubt he will get it back, but right now, if you look at him, you can see the shame in his eyes."

She fell silent for several moments before responding. "I don't know what I can do to make it better..."

"Apologize to him once I get you a new body. I'm sorry I've been dragging my ass on crafting one for you, but you need something better than bandit flesh. Your soul already has more power than I can bring forth with what I have here. And I haven't forgotten Thads! Trust me, he is number one on my list of people to kill, but your village is slaughtering children right now. They are taking an active role in making the world a shittier place, and I already know where they are." Threscia nodded as I spoke and seemed to take everything in.

"I can't guarantee that I won't do something like this in the future. I'm not exactly myself yet. I just have so much pent-up anger. I feel like I hate everything, including you, even though I know that I don't truly. It's like there's

another me that's still desperately trying to escape everything. It wants freedom, it wants joy and distraction, anything to get away from the facts. I'm not ready to understand what happened to me, what happened to Belairia and... what happened to Roscia. My own sister! She was forced to go through it all after they killed me! They did it to her! To *her*! She was innocent, my sweet little sister!" Threscia finished in a desperate scream, full of pain and resentment.

She began glowing again. The green soul flames started erupting from her here and there. I hugged her close and pressed her face into my chest. "We will find that bastard! He hasn't escaped. You know I won't die, so it's only a matter of time."

I opened my eyes and looked around at the goblins. Some were still laughing at Red. Some were hugging their loved ones with tears in their eyes, and some were embracing once lost mates.

"This is bigger than me or you. They also deserve vengeance. They saw their friends, family and lovers slain in the worst ways — they're also victims. I won't overlook them or any others I find along this twisted path. If someone falls by the wayside, I will pick them up and give them a new purpose, even if it is my own," I said evenly. She didn't respond, deep in thought.

"Now then, since you can control my body, would you like to infuse these souls to their heads and mount them?" I asked to break her out of her stupor.

She grinned a wicked grin and nodded avidly.

"You know how it all works; just drag the soul over the matching head and do what you will. I give you complete freedom during this time," I said.

She took control of my body, and I could feel it start to shift and condense. I felt my frame get smaller and watched as long brown locks covering my small breasts. Breasts? She was fleshcrafting my body into hers! Just this one time, I

would allow it. Besides, they deserved to see their executioner.

She moved with a methodical efficiency from head to head, infusing each soul. When she got to the fat man's charred head, she stopped for a moment.

"He was one of the worst ones. How do I hear them scream?"

This must be what Mors feels like.

"After you infuse it, look away from it and think Soul Steal."

She infused the fat man's head, and as it started to spout green flames, she looked away.

Soul Steal.

"It still burns! Why hasn't it stopped? Please, please! Kill me! Kill me!" he screamed.

She canceled Soul Steal and looked at the flaming head as she spoke. "Do you remember me? You told me what was to come — that I would drown in excrement. Do you want to know what is to come of you? *You* will burn until you are nothing. It should only take a hundred years or so — just enjoy the feeling while it lasts. Isn't that what you told me?"

She turned her head and used Soul Steal again.

"You! You are dead! Please!" the fat man screamed again. "If you are a goddess of death, just let me die! I didn't know!"

"To you I am the *only* goddess, and you won't find any mercy here!" she hissed as she grudgingly canceled Soul Steal.

She sighed a breath of relief as I felt my face form into a smile. "Mors," she said. "Please return John to normal."

I felt my armor pressing tightly against me once more as my bones and muscle shifted back into my regular form. Level 7 Fleshcrafting was no joke, though I don't think I could do what she had just done to my own body. I now knew this body better than all others, and without seeing myself I'm not sure I could restore my form.



I closed my eyes.

"Thank you," Threscia said evenly as she leaned into me. "I feel a little better now."

I put my arms around her and held her for a moment. I knew that this was basically like trying to put out a forest fire with an eye dropper, but I hoped her anger would fade after we killed Thads. For now, I would provide her what comfort I could and hope that I am helping her in some way.

## Chapter 4: Return - Thads

I leaned on one of my men's shoulders as we entered the Duke's acropolis. Just what the void *was* that thing!? I thought it was just some stupid barbarian lost in the woods. I stabbed it and *it survived*. I fucking stabbed it right through the heart and it barely batted an eye!

I felt myself start to shake again. How could this be? My mind drifted back to the horror of that night. I was still covered in my own men's blood, which had rained from the sky like Theresa's Armageddon. I had attracted something horrible with my actions. Something not from this world had been called, and I was responsible. Before this, I never believed in gods and their avatars, but now I knew the stories to be true.

I had somehow drawn the essence of evil right into my camp. Then I was even stupid enough to try to kill it. I cursed myself once more. How could I have been so naive? I'd heard these stories for more than half my life, but I never believed them. That was definitely an emissary of the void. No, it was the void itself.

I knew the moment it turned black that I wasn't looking at anything mortal, and the way its eyes glowed with hatred as flames shot out still makes me quake with fear. How could I have been so fucking dumb?

It had just been standing there, surrounded by armed men, talking casually. It's all so obvious now. I was taught that avatars exist during my clergy training. I was taught how to recognize them and how to fight them. But I got too cocky.

*I have to warn the Duke!* I fucked up. I don't know how to reverse this. I can only gather that my actions themselves

summoned this thing, and now it seeks its blood payment from me.

No. No! When have I ever been this weak?! I'm not that scared boy that Barneth abused anymore. I'm not that son that my family abandoned. I am Thads. I have tortured more victims than anyone alive. I forced them into submission. I brought them pain and despair. I even killed a Garanthi general.

I am strong. I am smart. I am heartless.

The shaking stopped as we neared the large doors to the Duke's study. I nodded to my man and he let me down. I braced myself on the large wooden doors, trying to collect myself before meeting with him.

The Duke and I had a strange relationship. He had to appear noble and collected to everyone else, but with me he was caring and vulnerable. He cared about me in a way that few men care for another, and I had always done my best to serve him. Of all the people in this world, he was the only one I would never betray.

An oppressive guilt loomed over me. How could I tell him what happened? How could I let him know that I brought a god's wrath down upon him when he had sacrificed so much to keep me out of harm's way?

I pulled the large brass handle and almost tumbled into the room.

"Thadeus? Are you okay? Oh, Theresa! What happened?" he exclaimed as he rushed toward me. He grasped me in his arms and led me to a chair by his desk.

"Your leg! My poor Thadeus, please tell me who has done this to you," he said mournfully as he ran his hand gently over what was left of my leg.

I clenched my fists so tight I thought I might draw blood, eyes watering as I responded. "I... I might have brought something horrible down upon us."

The Duke looked up at me, concerned, as he caressed my cheek.

"It's okay now. You're here with me. You know I will never allow anything to harm you."

His gaze turned to my stump. Anger filled his voice. "Now, who has done this to you? Who has maimed your delicate body?"

I began shaking once more. "It was a demon — no, a being of pure darkness birthed from the void itself."

He wrapped me in his embrace and I felt his warm tears on my cheek.

He replied, his words muffled. "I don't care if it's Theresa herself, I won't let it take you from me!"

I began to calm down as his warmth reached me. When I was alone and scared all those years ago, he picked me up. He gave me new purpose, a way to express my darkest needs and gain control of my life.

It was something I would never admit to another person even on my deathbed, but I needed him. No matter how I tried to convince myself otherwise, it always ended that way. I would dream up a big plan to ensnare him or betray him, but in the end I always ended up right back here. I knew that of all the people in this world he was the only person who saw the real me and accepted me. He nurtured me and protected me. When I was with him, I was safe.

For the first time, I let myself cry. I told him about everything — about what I was doing with the girls, about killing Bartas, and about the thing that came for me.

His face bore an expression of horror, but I could see the fire burning behind his eyes. "This creature will pay! I won't rest until I have its head!"

He rose, his face flushed in anger. "Guards!"

Several heavily armored men entered his study as I frantically wiped the tears from my face and plastered on my trademark sneer.

"Assemble all of our best men. We have an enemy to kill! I want heavy cavalry and a handful of mounted battlemages

ready to depart first thing tomorrow," he commanded as they ran to carry out his instructions.

"And you," he murmured into my ear. "Why don't you go take a bath and shave off that scraggly beard? In fact, shave everything." I shivered as I nodded.

He clapped and two maids entered the study and supported my weight as they guided me to the baths.

## Chapter 5: Confusion - Leera

Bob came barreling into the cave early this morning, waking us up with a ruckus.

"Fix 'em up!" he yelled before tearing off back into the forest.

I now sat with four girls, two of them unmoving.

The one with red hair had a terrible head wound; it was hard to tell where the blood started and her hair ended. I placed my hands on her and used healing directly. I had to do it two more times before she seemed to stabilize.

*What is happening here? Why am I suddenly bombarded by injured girls?* I healed the one with black hair next; her injuries weren't as severe, but I could only heal what I could touch. The healing mist wasn't nearly powerful enough for internal injuries.

The blonde and the one with brown hair and mismatched eyes looked on as I healed their friends.

"Would anyone like to tell me what's happening here?" I asked.

The one with brown hair was first to respond.

"Some fucked-up shit!" she said in her small voice, using words she had no business knowing. I could definitely tell she had been spending time with Bob.

The blonde one just looked at me without interest as if this was all trivial and played with her hair.

"I can plainly see that much. No, I mean specifically, what has John done? Why are you here? Where did Bob run off to?" I asked, hoping to get some actual answers.

Lina ran over while the dryad hid in the back of the cave.

"Please tell us," Lina pleaded.

The blonde's eyes seemed to light up as she looked at Lina.

"It's, it's..." The girl's voice quavered as her legs gave out underneath her.

I sat down beside her and rocked her in my arms as I spoke. "It's okay. You don't have to rush it. I can tell you're tired. Here."

I blew out a bit of my healing mist, and she seemed to recover a bit from her fatigue, but emotionally I could see she was still shaken. She had tears forming in the corners of her eyes, and it seemed as though she was at a loss as to where to start.

"I'll tell you," the blonde spoke up. "But first can I touch the little one's wings?"

Lina looked apprehensive but nodded.

The blonde squealed in delight as she sat down at Lina's side and began stroking her wings and hair. After a while Lina relaxed and sat in the blonde's lap.

Lina turned her head back up to the blonde and said, "Please tell us," with her pleading eyes.

The blonde girl melted like butter. She began to explain everything she knew, from the torture she had endured to her death, then John bringing her and the rest of the girls back and punishing the ones who did this to her.

I could feel my eyes misting over, and Lina was a sobbing mess. The blonde girl ripped off a piece of her shirt and handed it to Lina so she could blow her nose.

The brown-haired girl seemed to have calmed down now after listening to the blonde's story. She began to talk about what happened afterwards with Bob, then what happened and was still happening in her town. She pointed to the two unconscious girls and explained how Bob had saved them from a second death.

She then told me that John had headed off to the goblin village to finish off the other ones who left to attack it.

I hoped he got there in time. I shot Lina a worried glance as she spoke what was on both our minds.

"I'm sure John will save him!" She said as she threw her tiny fist in the air startling the blonde.

I didn't understand the gesture but I did it as well. The brown headed one followed suit, then the blonde.

I knew I could trust John to be okay, but I was still worried. He and Lina were all I had in this world and he was definitely doing something dangerous. Our son was able to walk here, so the goblin village shouldn't be that far away. Maybe I could find it and help John.

I looked over at the two unconscious girls. No, John would want me to take care of these girls. He had already went through all this trouble for them and I couldn't just abandon them here. You never know when another windigo or something worse may show up.

"Well, you girls must be starved. All we have right now is some bear. We don't have the tools to make fire yet, but you're welcome to it raw." I told them as I gestured to the bear carcass.

The blonde's lips curled in revulsion, but the brown headed one got up and ripped off a piece before sitting back down and tearing into it.

She eats like John. She must have been starving.

"It's weird, but this actually tastes good!" She said with a mouthful.

The blonde tilted her head and reached out her hand. The brown headed one ripped off a small piece and handed it to her.

The blonde held her nose with one hand as she placed the meat in her mouth and rapidly chewed before swallowing it down as if trying to avoid tasting it as much as possible.

She smacked her lips a couple of times then her face lit up. "Wow, that really isn't terrible." She said before going over to the bear and pulling off a sizable piece for herself.

She sat back down and pulled Lina into her lap as if Lina where a pet and began pulling off pieces to feed to her.



Lina seemed to be oblivious to this and obediently took the meat she was offered. I just shook my head as Lina gave me a puzzled look.

"Why don't we introduce ourselves. I'm John's mate Leera. The one that you seem to think is a pet is John's mate Lina. The one lurking in the back is a dryad that John picked up somewhere. He didn't name her and you can pretty much just ignore her, in fact I would encourage it."

I heard a hiss coming from the dryad. To me it was about as threatening as a kitten. She still had a long way to go before I would make her John's mate.

The brown headed one was the first to speak again. "I'm Rosie and this is Blondie. The one with red hair is Wendy and the black haired one is Lil'sis."

Blondie shook her head and spoke. "My name's not Blondie you know, it's-"

"I know what it is, but who's going to take the time to say that full sentence you call a name every time they want to say something to you. You're being inconsiderate! I'm sure Bob took a lot of time coming up with a good name for you." Rosie said cutting off Blondie before she could finish.

Blondie just shut her mouth and scowled at Rosie.

"I like it!" Lina said from Blondie's lap

Blondie's expression softened as she resumed petting Lina.

"Okay, fine! But just because Lina likes it." She said while she smiled down at her.

I still can't believe what these girls have went through. Now they're just talking and conversing like old friends. I just can't imagine going through all that and coming out as well as these girls have.

"How old are you both?" I asked.

"I just turned ten!" Rosie answered enthusiastically.

"I'll be sixteen in a few months." Blondie answered.

These are mere children! Ten! Ten and she's already been through hell. I felt myself start to tear up again.

I got up and sat behind Rosie hugging her as I felt a tear trace its way down my face.

"I'm so sorry... It's not right what happened to you. I don't know what I would-"

"It's okay now! John made it okay. When I prayed, he came. He made them suffer! Blondie didn't tell you about the torch garden yet." Rosie said as she hugged my arms.

"He turned them all into torches! They're going to burn forever for what they did to us!" She said in a cheerful voice.

I looked down at her face and she was absolutely beaming with joy. Blondie was also smiling as a tear ran down her face.

Okay, maybe these girls aren't alright. I just hugged Rosie tighter as I rocked her back and forth. I love John, but he is quickly gathering a collection of broken people. I worry about our future and the future of these girls who have been touched by cruelty. As it stands all I can see is a life of violence and death.

Wait, she prayed, and he came. John had mentioned he was part god. Does that mean that he will be dropping everything and running off any time someone somehow prays to him? If it was just our flock I could understand it, but it looks like we will forever be growing.

I looked back at the dryad. Her eyes shined in the darkness. I'm just one person, I'll never be able to take care of them all. I guess this is my burden as his mate. I accepted without actually putting any thought into it but to me it's still worth it. He's like a raw nerve, he reacts so much to any that touch him. I think, even if he doesn't realize it, that he needs us to protect him, to serve as a buffer between him and this world. To show him that he can be loved.

I felt Rosie's grip lighten and looked down to see her eyes were closed. She had fallen asleep on me. I leaned her back into me and let her head rest on my chest.

Across from me Blondie was yawning. I guess that they had a busy night. I didn't have any bedding to give them.

"I'm sorry Blondie, I don't have a bed for you." I said in a hushed voice.

"It's okay, compared to the last place I stayed I'll be fine sleeping on the floor. Provided I get to cuddle this one." She said as she looked adoringly down at Lina.

"It's okay with me." Lina said smiling back up at her.

The Blonde lay down and Lina wrapped them both with her wings. I could already see that Lina would make a loving mother. I only hoped that our family would survive the chaos that would come for us with John's role as a god.

## Chapter 6: Training - John

Bob needed to rest and I needed the parts and torches from the bandit camp. I took the wounded goblins aside, towards the left over parts pile.

"You need prove self!" I said in goblin.

"You die, I remake you, but only if ready. Show me gob's courage now!" I told them.

I walked about ten feet out and stood by the parts. The first goblin to respond was another older looking male. He crawled towards me. He was one of the ones that I had to remove burnt parts from earlier.

Some less injured goblins rushed over to help him.

"No! He do this by self!" I commanded.

They stepped back and looked on with worried gazes.

He finally reached me and I spoke again. "You okay with death?"

He nodded.

I rolled him over and used my fleshcrafting to stop his heart. His eyes bulged as he released his last breath.

I used Soul Steal and opened the soul screen.

"Mors, teach him English and help me craft him a body like the rest."

Mors moved with her usual efficiency and created a magnificent body for him using his own body as a base.

I imparted all abilities, used blend and infused his soul.

He stood then knelt before me. "Thank you, mighty Two-Dong John! I pledge myself to you as our new chief and god."

I mentally cursed Threscia.

"Please, just call me John." I replied as I offered my hand.

He took it and I pulled him to his feet. He walked back over to the ones that tried to help him. He looked down at them and bowed in gratitude.

"This something important! Need to do with thanks! Prove not weak!" He said to them.

The men stuck out their chests with pride and the women nodded. I could tell that he understood what this was all about. I wanted their absolute loyalty. I didn't want any half-hearted goblins feeling like I forced them into a new life with a different body. I needed them to understand and become strong.

They lined up. The ones that could walk were first, followed by the ones that had to crawl.

I converted each and every one of them until there was just one left. It was a female from what I could tell. She held a sword as a prop for her missing leg. She screamed at me in something that was neither goblin nor English.

She charged me in a mad hop swinging her sword in the air as she lunged at me. I dodged out of the way as she continued hopping until she hit a building. She then began attacking the building with fervor. Slashing ferociously at it's mud walls.

Was she blind? I looked at her as she carried on her one goblin war against architecture. No, I don't think that's what it is. Frustrated, angry, confused? I had no idea.

She turned towards me and in a random act of passion drove the sword through herself.

I ran over to her as she lay bleeding on the ground.

"Why you do this? House not hurt you." I said as she just smiled up at me with blood stained teeth.

"I not weak, but I not submit." She said as she spasmed one last time before falling dead.

Holy shit, this goblin has earned my respect.

I dragged her body back over to the parts pile. Even if she didn't submit I wanted her to live. I had Mors teach her English, then I began work on her body based on Mors' input. The body that she wanted was actually taller than me. It took the remaining pieces of the parts pile.

I gave her all abilities, used blend and infused her soul.

She was a strong woman, broad shoulders, burly muscles and crazy eyes. Her hair was kept short and spiked upwards. She opened her eyes and sat up. She threw out her hand and I took it as she stood.

"I'm going to claim that one!" She said without hesitation as she pointed over to the now sleeping Bob.

Before I could respond she was sprinting towards him. She leapt in the air, landing on top of him. She almost effortlessly rolled him over and straddled him.

"What in the... Oh yeah!" Bob said as she began to force him inside herself.

Well then, I guess Bob finally has a mate. I turned my back as the strange scene unfolded behind me.

It was hard to tell if they were fighting or fornicating as the screams and battle cries could mean either.

I heard one final yell from Bob. "And... Boom goes the dynamite!"

She came strutting back over to me before she spoke. "I have a request. I want one of those." she pointed at my crotch.

Oh no, Bob really has met his soulmate. I used what was left and crafted her, her very own pervy guy. I wasn't sure who would be the mother or the father when the babies came but I didn't think it mattered really. Two strange souls had found one another and I wouldn't get between them, figuratively or literally.

As soon as I was done she ran off again, and I heard a whole new series of noises behind me.

"Yada, dame! Yabai!... Iku! Iku! Ikuuu!" Bob screamed in a girlish voice.

"Dammit Mors, what did you teach him?" I asked.

"That wasn't me, that was the book-fairy, and who knows. Nothing good I would imagine." She replied coldly.

I could tell by her tone that this comparison somehow made her angry.

"It's okay Mors. You're what I always wanted. I'm sorry I got the two of you confused, it's just that when I think of fairies, you're the only one that comes to mind now." I said as the grunting behind me stopped.

I turned around to see the two of them cuddling. Bob was the little spoon even though he was more than twice her size.

It's good to see Bob happy again, but I have other things that need my attention. I looked around. The goblins that I had recently recreated where equipping themselves with the bandit gear. The rest had opened the food stores and where helping themselves to some dried meat and bread. A few of the older ones where even enjoying a drink.

Reginauld and Belairia were still fighting in the distance, and at some point Liz and Nex had joined them. It was strange to see Liz trying to fight with her staff, but I could tell she was serious as she swung at Nex. Nex was able to dodge as she threw a stick at Liz hitting her in the forehead. Even though Liz had speed, she didn't seem to have much hand-eye coordination.

I had an idea and walked over to them. As I approached they stopped fighting as another stick smacked Liz in the face. I wanted to see if I could teach them some magic. From Mors' lesson on affinities, I figured there was a strong chance that at least one if not all of them would be able to learn dark magic. Dark magic seemed to be less about offense and more about control, but I think it might vary person to person.

I didn't use chants so I wasn't sure that I could actually teach them anything but it would be worth a try.

"What may we help you with, Chief?" Reginauld said as he bowed.

"I was thinking that I could try to teach everyone some magic." I replied.

Liz's eyes lit up excitedly. Belairia and Nex just looked at me with questioning expressions. Now that they were

staring at me I didn't know where to start.

"Mors?"

"Yes Master."

"Do you have any ideas here?"

"Well, you don't chant. You're what is called a channeler. You focus on a feeling and call the power out from inside yourself so you may have to show them the spell so they have an idea of what it looks like. Then you will have to tell them how it feels."

"Thank you again Mors."

"Alright, gather up behind me and make sure you can see in front of me." I told them as they got behind me.

I used dark tendrils and the ground in front of me erupted with translucent black tentacles.

"This one is called Dark Tendrils. If your enemy is strong, like a bear or a sha'dwarg these do pretty much nothing. But on weak bandit scum and probably other humanoids these have two effects. One, the shock factor, and two, they hold them in place. When you want to use it, visualize it in your head then think the words dark tendrils."

Liz was the first to try. When she said dark tendrils the ground became dark as it did with mine, but no tendrils came out.

"I'm sorry, they're just too gross. I don't like thinking about them." She said as she hung her head.

"It's okay, you did good. That was more than I was expecting for a first try." I replied as she stepped back.

Nex was next. She concentrated with all her might and eventually a small space of ground darkened but it quickly disappeared when she opened her eyes.

"I am sorry my love, I don't think this magic thing is for me."

She looked disappointed as I looked down at her. I could tell that she was excited about this but had difficulty visualizing it. I needed something that she could imagine easily. She had been able to create the blackness but unable



to make something that was alive like a tentacle. Maybe she could make something simpler.

I reached down and grabbed one of her daggers.

"Let's try something new. Visualize this." I said as I held her dagger in front of her.

She focused and a pool of black energy formed in her hand. She began to concentrate on it as she closed her eyes. Eventually it took on a dagger-like shape and she opened her eyes. As soon as she looked at it, it disappeared. But she looked pleased with herself.

"That was really cool!" I told her as I bent down and kissed her forehead.

"Keep practicing that and I think you might have a new spell soon." I said as she smiled up at me.

I handed her back her dagger as Belairia stepped up.

"Alright, you're my daughter, so I expect some great things from you here!"

She nodded enthusiastically at me as she closed her eyes for a moment before throwing out her arm. A single black area appeared in front of us with one giant non-moving tentacle. It just kind of lingered there for a moment before thrashing about wildly.

"Good Job!" I said as she hugged me while making an excited squeal.

She marveled at her work, "I never thought I could do that!"

"Wait! I have an idea!" She said excitedly as her tentacle disappeared.

She closed her eyes again, and began focusing. I saw a large amount of black energy coating her arm.

Uh oh, this might be dangerous.

Before I could stop her she threw her arm out again. This time a large tentacle erupted from her hand and began thrashing around violently. I grabbed her wrist to keep her from being thrown around as the tentacle left large gouges in the earth where it hit.

"Try to control it! Don't let it have a mind of its own!" I yelled.

I looked at her face. An expression of panic had replaced her earlier look of excitement.

"It's okay! It's a part of you, just move it as if it were your arm." I reassured her.

I had no idea if she could actually control it as I had never tried to control my own, but I had faith that she could do it. She had shaped the blackness inside me, compared to that, this seemed simple.

Soon the tentacle stopped moving and became limp. I released her wrist and stepped back. She raised her hand in the air and lifted the tentacle up. She then brought it down in a whipping motion striking the ground. Large chunks of earth and rock were blown to the sides as dirt rained down on us.

I can honestly say this was tremendously impressive. She was able to take a spell that I only ever thought of as a means to bind and turned it into a weapon. I wondered how her fights with Reginauld would go from this point on.

She closed her hand and the tentacle disappeared.

"That was awesome! A little scary but awesome!" She said as she hugged me.

I mussed her hair and she got back behind me.

It was Reginauld's turn now.

"Do you have anything more tasteful? I don't feel like this spell fits me. Maybe something more direct?" He asked.

Well I did have a few other spells but for the most part they weren't visual. Weakness was a direct effect and Petrifying Gaze needed a victim. Dark Shroud might work, but it was daytime and I couldn't activate it in direct light.

"I may have one you would like, but I can't do it in broad daylight. Come find me tonight and bring Athen. I'll try to teach you then." I responded as he nodded.

"Reginauld, try to train Liz. Belairia and Nex, keep practicing your magic." I ordered as I began walking back

towards the celebrating goblins.

I needed to organize a group to come with me to the bandit camp. There was still a large amount of food and stuff there that I didn't bother investigating at the time. I also wanted my torches. By my count I would need at least thirty goblins and the oni just to carry this stuff. Bob would also be ideal, but he was indisposed at the moment.

I thought briefly about going back to the cave for Leera and Lina. I missed them and wanted to see them but I knew when I had them all together here I would have to claim them. That's not exactly something I was looking forward to. Nex didn't have to worry as she was the chief's daughter before and was already established as strong. Liz on the other hand I was a bit worried about but so far no goblins had approached her. Maybe they didn't know what to make of her. But Leera would be mobbed and poor Lina might even be shot at.

I sighed to myself. No, I couldn't put it off. I looked at the goblins as they laughed and drank. I'll let them have their day, they deserve it.

I'll go back and get my mates, it's time we got out of that cave. I also want to reunite Belairia with her sister and check on the girls. Then tomorrow I'll get the supplies and maybe tomorrow night I'll pay a visit to the human town.

## Chapter 7: Bloodbath and Beyond - Sidney

I opened my eyes to see a group of women hanging by their feet above me, their throats were cut open and their blood ran freely.

I looked at the closest one as she jerked and I was covered in her blood.

Ah, I must be in hell. Of course I would be. It was foolish of me to think otherwise. Maybe she would be here... Caroline... No! An angel like that would never be in hell!

I looked down, I was in a warm, red pool. I looked back up at the hanging woman. I saw trickles of blood dripping from her pointy ears.

Huh, I guess this is blood. Is that a demon?

I raised my hand. It was strange, thin. I need to try again, maybe this time...

"Mistress Eva! You've done it! He actually moved!" A voice sounded from the darkness.

"We will see, give him the test." A female voice replied.

A hooded man approached me from the darkness.

Ah, this must be my devil, here to torture me. I may linger here for a while, maybe my suffering will somehow make things right.

No! The only thing that matters is finding her!

"Here your grace. Please look on our work, we restored you to your former self!" He said as he handed me a mirror.

Perfect. I took the mirror and smashed it against the stone walls of my tub. I picked up one of the larger shards of glass and thrust it through my throat. I began sawing as the man started screaming.

Caroline, maybe I will find you this time. I ripped the glass from my neck as blood sprayed from me, covering the now shocked man.

My vision went upside down as my head bent backwards touching the middle of my back.

I sighed, though it came out in more of a gurgle. My head righted itself as I saw the blood from the pool flowing into me.

"Fuck!" I screamed.

I took the shard and repeatedly stabbed myself until my hand was in tatters and my chest was speckled in wounds.

Again the blood flowed into me and I was fine.

Let's go for the brain this time. I grabbed another shard and lined it up with my eye.

Here goes. I stabbed myself through the eye then smashed my head repeatedly on the stone wall.

I felt a crack, then several. My vision went in different directions as my face separated.

Then everything returned to normal.

I threw the shard of glass and sank back into the pool. This really is hell.

"Come on you pointless fuck, start the torturing. I'm bored already." I said as the man feverishly wiped his face, trying to clean my blood from his eyes.

"Mistress, this is really him! He hated vanity!" The man said as if trying to convince someone.

I don't fucking care anymore. Caroline isn't here so everything I did was for not. Just let me die. If I can't see her, then let me become nothing.

A woman with pointed ears and a sheer robe approached me from the darkness.

She was beautiful, if you could call her that. To me, all other women looked like dog shit on a hot afternoon. Only one ever mattered to me, only Caroline and this wasn't her.

"The Holy Order of Rosereth welcomes you back, Progenitor." She said as she bowed before me.

Ah, shit... Good one God.

## Chapter 8: Return to the cave - John

I had decided to walk back myself after I bid the goblins farewell. I left Athen and Reginauld in charge. Reginauld said he would instruct Athen on the finer points of goblin leadership and I left him to it.

It was now mid afternoon.

Huh, I just felt a new presence. This one is coming from a long way north of here. It would probably take a month or longer going Bob-speed.

This one isn't calling me however, it's just announcing itself. Something about it seemed wrong though. I can't put my finger on it, but somehow I think it's pissing me off.

It had become a little more difficult to track presences now as the goblin village was lit up like the fourth of July.

Should I form a religious order? The church of John? I shuddered at the thought but something like this was bound to spring up at some point and I needed to set the rules myself before they started making sacrifices or castrating themselves in my name. Luckily Cool-aid isn't a thing here. Oh god, I need to make Goblin Pies a sin. But who will be my priest?

Reginauld didn't seem like the sort who would take a back seat role like priest. Athen now had a plethora of warrior and cut-throat skills. Maybe I will make it someone who has an exceptional affinity for dark magic.

Maybe one of the girls? Hopefully, that would protect them from being marked.

I saw the old familiar clearing in front of the cave.

I used Life Sense and inhaled, checking the area for threats.

I smelled fresh rot, and old books coming from the opposite side of the cave.

I recognized this smell. Though today the smell of decay was allot stronger. My mouth watered involuntarily.

The necromancers had returned as they said they would but it's a little earlier than expected. I wonder if something happened.

I heard the sound of giggling and lively conversation coming from the cave. I moved carefully to avoid getting the girls attention. I didn't want the necromancers meeting them yet. Even though they seemed nice enough they were still a threat.

I headed back towards the small area where I first met them.

I saw Ralphus sitting there on a large wooden box.

I somehow feel like I should make an entrance. I found a good spot behind him and activated Life sense and Soul Steal.

I leaped out, landing beside him.

I heard an unnaturally girlish shriek come from him as a whip of green energy shot from his hand severing my arm.

His eyes returned to their normal calm demeanor as he spoke. "By the void, man! You don't ever sneak up on a necromancer, we're paranoid by nature."

I canceled life sense and Soul Steal, and grafted my arm back on.

I used Blend.

I was right to be cautious of them. I'm pretty sure Ralphus could reduce me to a quivering pile of mush with that attack if he kept going.

"That was some attack just there! What kind of magic was that?" I asked.

"Oh, I call it bound soul lash. It's my own creation. It's basically just a whip powered by soul mana." He said proudly.

I could almost hear the smile from his words.

"I'm very much against binding souls unless they deserve it." I replied.



"Hmm, that might make my request a little awkward. But first, I bring gifts." He opened the large box as the smell of decay hit me.

He pulled out a small wooden chest and handed it to me as he continued to speak. "I figured you like creepy things so I brought you this. They're one of my top selling items in the parts shop."

I hesitantly opened the chest.

"Woah, careful there!" He warned as I felt something stab into my finger.

"Shit!" I pulled my hand back as I struggled not to drop the box.

I looked down at the wound on my fingertip as my flesh turned to sludge and dripped off of the bone.

I peered into the chest alarmed. There were several insects there. They looked like a combination of a house centipede and a spider. They had two large barbed appendages coming from their grotesque faces that were dripping with venom as they frantically skittered around.

My blood ran cold. I was frozen in place as I fought the urge to scream like a little girl and throw the chest into the forest.

I quickly slammed the lid and looked back at Ralphus.

He laughed. "I guess I probably should have warned you, but your reaction was hilarious."

"J, just what the hell are those things!?" I asked still shaken.

"An amalgamation of a few different insects that live around the Academy. My family has actually been selectively breeding them for years. We isolate the queen, and have the males fight. Over the centuries they have truly become something fearsome." His voice trailed off with a wicked tone.

Got it, don't piss off Ralphus if you don't want to be eaten by nightmare bugs.

"And just why did you think these would be a good gift for me?"

"Fleshcrafting! Just imagine the possibilities for someone who has your abilities. Even our students with their sub-par flesh golems can make them lethal with this. Just graft a few of their stingers onto your creations teeth or fingertips and your enemies will feel instant painful death. Speaking of that, I'm impressed you aren't dead."

I was though. I was just too startled earlier to notice.

I used the contents of my stomach along with fleshcrafting to restore my finger.

I sighed as I responded. "Nope, I'm dead."

I let the ghoul stomach do its job at trying to mend my systems from the venom these things had injected me with.

"You know Ralphus, I'm starting to think you have something against me."

"No sir! In fact, I came here early with the intention to ask you a favor. It wouldn't make sense to kill you. Besides, you already told us last time that you were undead, well living undead, which brings me to my favor." He gestured me over to the box.

I looked inside and saw a badly decomposed woman with mismatched parts.

So, I guessed right last time. He wants a zombie-girl.

I sighed as I spoke. "You know I don't do bound souls."

"This one is different, she's my wife. I don't actually want her to be bound. I just don't have another way to bring her back. Please! I beg you!" He said in a pleading tone with sad eyes.

He reached into his robes and brought out a piece of red amber.

"She's in here. I've brought her back many times now, but she always rots. She can't talk, and when I order her to be herself this happens." He removed his mask.

His face was mangled. It was obvious he had used a flesh golem to graft on replacement parts here and there as his

skin was mismatched.

"If you don't mind a little pain I can fix that for you." I responded

He placed his mask back on and spoke. "I don't care about me, I just want her."

"I understand. Do you trust me with her soul?" I asked.

He hesitated for a moment then nodded, before he started chanting and the amber cracked.

I used Soul Steal and her soul flew into me.

"This may take me a moment Ralpus, I'd like to talk with her."

"What!? How?"

"It's just a thing I can do. Don't worry, I just need to know her preferences. I hope you brought extra parts as the body is fairly damaged."

He reached behind the box and brought out a bloody burlap sack.

"Don't ask where I get my supply. I'm not sharing that information." He said in a serious tone.

"Alright, take her out of the box and pile the parts by her." I ordered as I closed my eyes.

I opened Soul of a deranged lover 44%

A woman sat there motionlessly. I approached her and she bent her neck to the side at an unnatural angle with a crack.

I could feel the dark god watching with interest as the girl leapt at me.

I closed out of the soul screen.

Holy shit, no one's ever attacked me in soul form before. I'm glad I never tried to speak to the windigo or sha'dwarg. Though I know nothing could hurt me, that was still quite a shock.

Maybe there was something I could do to make her friendlier.

"Mors, teach her English and try to fill in the gaps with happy thoughts."

"I can't add thoughts or memories. Maybe, happy language?"

"Happy language? Like what?"

"The words that make you happy, perhaps they would have a good effect on her."

"Okay, but no porn words or profanity this time."

I opened her soul once more.

She was seated again like before, her body hunched over in an inhuman way. If I had to guess I would say she has about as much memories of being a zombie as she has memories from being alive.

"Hello." I said cautiously.

"Oh, hi there! It's a pleasure to meet you! Teehee" She said in an eerily cheery voice while showing a bloody smile.

I could do without the forced teehee. This is all somehow creepier.

"So, just to check, how do you feel about Ralphus?"

"Well, he certainly is a fine man, and ever so tasty as well! I still remember the last time. I just love his cute little cherub cheeks they're so delicious!" She said with enthusiasm.

I guess this explains why Ralphus's face looks like ground beef.

"Ooh, am I going to get to see him again? Yay! I can't wait!" She was now licking her lips in a disturbing way.

I think bringing her back unbound would be the same thing as signing Ralphus's death certificate.

"Try to remember what you were like before this." I said.

"Before what, sweetie-pie?" She replied.

"Try to remember what it was like when you were alive, really alive. Try to remember your original body and your memories of Ralphus."

She began changing forms gradually. She now looked like a frail twenty-something academic with glasses.

"I remember now... Ralphus? I hated that guy... At least at first I think. He was always following me around and he

always smelled like dead things, even more so than the rest of us. We all used to make fun of him... I remember him crying over me. I don't remember what happened but I think I was sick for a long time. He was the only one who came to see me each day." She paused for a moment as her lips formed into a frown and her face took on a troubled expression.

"I remember I was there to attempt to attain lich-hood. I went to the academy knowing that I was dying. There was nothing the healers could do, and there was no way I could afford all the resurrections I would need to stay alive. I wasn't royalty and the church didn't work for free." She said in a sullen voice.

I nodded as I let her continue.

"I remember the night he gave me the ring, at that point it was too large for me as I had grown too weak to feed myself. I was relying on him for everything. He had this crazy idea that he could bring me back afterwards and we would still be together. Of course I knew how that would turn out, but I had grown to feel for him and I didn't want to break his heart with the facts. The night I lost my virginity, was the night I died. I guess my heart couldn't take all the stimulation." She reached under her glasses to wipe a tear from her eye.

"I remember the first time I saw him again after that. He was so excited, but I couldn't think. When he told me to be myself I..." She started sobbing.

"He... He let me eat him. He said it was okay." She was now racked with sadness.

"It's alright, you can see him again. He's fine." I said to reassure her.

Her eyes lit up for a moment but then turned sad once more.

"How can I ever face him after what I did to him? That wasn't the only time either. Each time I saw him all I can

remember are his tears, then his screams as I tore at him." She said almost unintelligibly through sobs.

"You have to be strong for him as he's been for you all these years! Did you ever tell him that you loved him?" I said.

"No..." She was a crying mess now.

I willed myself forward and knelt by the crying woman. I hugged her close and let her cry into my chest.

She continued to weeping for some time before she pulled away. Her eyes now shown with an ever-growing look of determination.

"Are you ready?" I asked.

"Yes" She replied as she wiped her face.

I opened my eyes to see Ralphus eyeing me suspiciously.

I brought my hand to my face. I was leaking that black stuff again.

"Are you okay?" Ralphus asked with concern.

I walked over to him and pulled him into an hug.

"You're a good man, Ralphus." I said as I released the confused necromancer.

I looked down at the body. I could barely see the resemblance between her face and the almost mummified face staring back up at me.

The parts pile wasn't large, but it was more or less a full person's worth.

I cracked my knuckles. It's time to get to work.

"Mors, use her soul as a template, we're recreating her as she was except healthy this time."

"Yes master." Mors replied with a sniffle.

My hands moved at an incredible speed as I went over her body ripping off decaying flesh and grafting on new flesh. Soon her body was complete. I gave her a mana generating heart, all abilities and used blend.

I stepped back to look at my work but Ralphus quickly covered her with a robe.

I infused her soul as he watched in anticipation.

She opened her eyes and pulled him down on top of her.

"It's okay. If I die by your hands I'll accept it." He said as he allowed himself to be pulled down without resistance.

"No... I won't hurt you anymore. I... I love you! I've been waiting forever to say it. I'm sorry I couldn't say it when I was alive, I just didn't want you to dwell on me when I was gone." She said as she pulled off his mask and kissed him.

The two of them lay there for some time embracing one another as their tears flowed freely.

I feel like I should give them some privacy but these woods aren't a safe place. Finally, they separated and I turned my back so she could get dressed.

After a few moments, I felt someone place a hand on my shoulder. I turned to see Ralphus smiling his mangled smile. He pulled me in and patted me on the back.

"I don't even have the words to thank you." He said as more tears streaked down his damaged face.

"It's alright consider it a favor. If your motivations were to subjugate her or if she told me that you had done something to her, we may very well have had a different conversation right now. But you were truthful and she does indeed love you. I guess you'll have to swear off other zombie-girls now though." I said with a laugh.

He laughed with me as she approached.

"What's this about other zombie girls?" She said with a scowl.

"Oh, that, John was just joking right. Tell her John." He pleaded.

I kept silent. A moment passed and she began laughing.

"I'm just kidding, I know you would never cheat on me." She joked as Ralphus let out a relieved sigh.

"So, are you still sure you don't want me to fix that face of yours?" I asked.

"Please do. I don't want to be reminded of what I..." She said as sadness once again filled her eyes.

Ralphus panicked. "Yes, please do!"

"You may want to lay down for this, it won't be pleasant." I told him.

He lay down and removed the top of his robe. His whole upper body was a mess of scars and grafted flesh.

Her tears burst from her as she looked at him.

"I did all this?" She said as she sobbed into her hands.

"It's okay, I would go through it a hundred more times for you. You are the only reason I live at all. You're my only motivation to keep breathing. I was always yours. From the very first moment I saw you this body belonged to you, even as a light snack." He joked.

Her sobs were interrupted as she laughed.

"You always do this to me. You can't make me cry one minute then have me laughing the next." She said with a smile.

"Okay, are you ready?" I asked him.

"I'm no stranger to pain. Let's begin." He replied.

Since I wasn't sure how damaged he was or if I would need any additional parts. I fused my finger with his shoulder.

As I thought, he's in bad shape. I looked over to the scraps from the parts pile. I hope there is enough there. I looked up to the woman.

"I'm sorry, I never asked your name. Mine is John."

"I'm Languoria."

"Languoria, will you bring me those scraps?"

She began running back and forth bringing what she could.

"You have a lot of muscle damage in your face, neck, and chest. I'll replace what I can, but you may have to come back with more parts later for a second treatment."

"I was planning to, I still have a few more things to give you over there. But from this day forth I will bring you new things whenever I find them. Consider them my way of repaying you. Though nothing I can think of, not even my life will ever be enough to express my gratitude." He looked



up at me and I could see in his eyes that he felt guilty about all I had done for him.

"Alright my friend, this may hurt." I said as he closed his eyes.

I grafted on muscle in the places he was lacking it, prioritizing the face and neck. I managed to restore one pectoral, and some muscle around his clavicles but he would need to come back for the rest. Surprisingly, even though I was pulling his skin apart and moving his muscles his eyes remained shut.

I used blend and he screamed.

I guess everyone has their limit.

I felt something dangerous watching me. I looked up to see Languoria glaring at me. If looks could kill, then I might be dead right now.

Ralphus coughed.

"It's okay, he warned me it was painful. I just underestimated how painful." He said as he reached his hand up and felt his face. He smiled a broad smile.

To my surprise he was baby-faced. He had big rosy cheeks, a small nose and a soft chin.

"It looks like I'll have to regrow my beard again." He said with a laugh.

Languoria fell to her knees over him and began covering his face in kisses. He pulled her down and they shared a long kiss before he sat back up.

They're cute together, but I didn't come back to see Ralphus.

I picked up my small chest of pure concentrated nightmare fuel and called out to Ralphus. "Alright Ralph, I'm leaving. I have a lot of stuff on my plate right now, and seeing the two of you together made me miss my loved ones."

"Wait! You can't leave yet, I still have more stuff for you." He said as he got up.

I watched as he reached behind the box and brought out another bag. Just how the hell did he carry all of this stuff here?

"There's a few robes, some fabric, supplies for repairs and some amber in there. Barzealis also included a basic magic book from his personal collection. You might not be able to read it though, it's in the old language." He said as he thrust the bag at me.

I took it, it was actually quite heavy. I couldn't imagine a normal person dragging the weight of two bodies and a bag of clothes all this way up a mountain in the woods.

"How did you bring all this stuff here?" I asked.

He lifted up the box to display some glowing chains as he spoke. "Read that book, you'll find your answer there."

Bloody academics, always trying to get you to read and stuff.

"Oh, and you can have that box as well. I won't be needing it anymore." He said as he smiled at Languoria.

She ran over to me and hugged me as she spoke. "Even if I live a hundred years now, there will never be a way for me to repay you. Not only did you bring me back, you restored my mind and made me realize my feelings. You really are a god of compassion."

I laughed openly, if she only knew. Wait, did she know I was a god?

"I'm only partially a god. Though certainly not one of compassion." I replied while still chuckling a bit.

Their eyes went wide as they shared surprised looks.

"I see, it all makes sense now." Ralphus said as Languoria bowed.

"When you said that you consumed the book of souls, I had my suspicions. But I thought you were a liar until you were able to restore Barz to a living state. There is also the fact that you seemed to lack any knowledge of customs or common sense. And your body, At first glance you might seem like a human crossbreed, but the proportions are

wrong. Then you have Soul Steal at a higher level than Eunice, who is void knows how old." He trailed off and stood there for a while mumbling to himself.

Languoria rose up and forced him into a bow.

"You idiot! You met a God and your just casually examining him. He's done a lot for us. Bow your head!" She chastised him.

He looked back up at me and spoke. "Sorry about that, I feel kind of bad about giving you bugs and clothes now."

"You both should stand up. I'm only part of a god, and I appreciate the thoughtfulness of these gifts. I can tell you were trying to think of what I would find useful, and you were right. I'm also sorely lacking in knowledge about this world and what I am. The next time you come I would be happy if you could bring any history texts or maps with you, also anything at all you may know about the void god, or the dark god." I responded.

Ralphus's eyes seemed like they would pop out of his head.

"The void god? As in, there is something that rules the void itself?" He asked in disbelief.

"Well, not exactly. I think the void may be a small part of me, along with the abyss and the dark itself. I also consumed and converted a fragment of the god of souls, though that seemed familiar, like taking something back. I think I'm basically the god of nothing." I responded.

Ralphus was hyperventilating and I was afraid he might lose consciousness. Languoria was sweating profusely but didn't speak a word as she rubbed Ralphus's back. Neither of them stood.

She replied, in English this time. "Do you realize you've just dropped a bomb on us. Our order has worshiped the void for as long as it was around. Some of our brethren worship the abyss. There have been wars and debates for centuries, you just told us that they are all tied to the same god, which is you. He's not able to process it. He knows

what he has seen, but you've just told him that you're basically our god."

Ralpus brought his breathing under control as he spoke. "I don't even know what to say. This changes everything. So many of our beliefs are based on the different realms. My family has always stood for the side of void. We fought and died against those who believed that the abyss was the rightful realm of our order. To think that the darkness itself was all of these things and that there is a sentient god of it... That his avatar itself has helped me. I can't fathom it. It just can't be true."

Avatar? I knew about the movie where blue furries had sex with plants, but what the hell is he talking about.

"What is considered an avatar?" I asked.

He stared at me incredulously as he spoke. "You are one, but you don't even know what it is?" He laughed.

"An avatar is the god itself, placed here on our mortal plane. From what you are describing, you can be nothing else."

"I'm just John. Though we are fused, the dark god is the dark god, and I am me. We are our own entities."

He placed his hand on his chin and stared off in silence for a while.

"At the end of the day I'm basically just a super advanced, living flesh golem with high affinities for dark, soul and death magic." I informed him.

"Now, I know the two of you probably can't wait to hop into the nearest bush and catch up on lost time but I think I can trust you enough to introduce you to some very important people to me. I also feel like maybe you could listen to my story and provide some information that may help me track someone down."

"Did this person offend the dark god?" Languoria asked.

"...Yes" I responded through clenched teeth.

"If we help you, are you intending to kill them?" Ralpus asked.

"Oh how they'll scream. I'll take them apart again, and again, only letting him rest to be raped. Then he'll be my personal torch until he burns away to nothing." I said as I felt my face contorting into a wicked grin. I can almost feel it now.

I felt the dark god wrapping me in it's cold embrace as I seethed. I want to tear his tender flesh apart, to feel his bones break and separate. To hear his lamentations and pointless screams for mercy as I...

I felt something warm around me. I noticed that Languoria was hugging me and I snapped out of it.

She wiped my face with the sleeve of her robe. Though it was already black, it seemed darker now.

"I'm sorry, I will tell you the story. Just follow me, it's not far."

I don't know what this black stuff is. Is it tears? It always fades back into my body after a while and the only time I feel better is when someone wipes it for me. Are they taking something from me? Am I infecting them?

"Do either of you know what this black oily stuff is?"

"I can't really say. I can guess that for someone so close to darkness that you may be channeling it involuntarily. It could be something from your realm." Ralphus replied.

Languoria examined her sleeve with a worried expression.

"So far, no one has been hurt by it, but I worry." I said as I led them to the nearby clearing.

"Stop!" I commanded in a hushed tone.

## Chapter 9: Rosereth's Champion - Sidney

That pointy-eared bitch tells me I'm the 'progenitor' like I'm supposed to know exactly what that means. I thought about smashing her pretty little face in but what's the point.

I want to die but they've even taken that from me.

After her big unveiling to her robed cult of pointy-eared freaks she took me to the side.

She told me that she knows I'm not her progenitor. She begged me to play along. She even offered herself to me but I slapped her.

There is no woman who can equal the one that I lost. The one that I killed.

I thought that god had played a trick on me but now I see the joke was on her. Just like Caroline, I would only let her down.

I asked her, how I can die. She told me that the usurper's champion might be able to kill me. I was overjoyed.

This means that there is a way out of this hell. There may be a chance to find her in the next life. I will never stop looking, not until I see her again. I have to believe that she's out there somewhere. I need to know that there's a way to find her again. If there isn't any, then I pray to all the gods in all their realms, let me fade away to nothing. I can't stomach living in a world without her.

I will dance to their little tune, letting them believe it's a happy jig that ends with ribbons and fanfare, but it will actually be my dirge. At least this time the tune should be more appropriate than the last.

But... Wait, what if Caroline is here, like I am? Trapped somewhere in this strange hell. What can I do to find her?

How can I know truly that I didn't miss her somewhere. What if I move on to another hell, only to find that she's here.

It didn't matter, I would find her eventually, even if eventually meant eternity. I am forever her servant, she bought my life with her's.

I still remember her screams. I was too strung out to react as that psychopath tore her apart. He cut me as well, but I survived and she died, all because I was too fucked up to do something. I might as well of killed her myself.

He always looked so unassuming. He was some computer nerd who lived upstairs. How was I supposed to know he would go apeshit crazy one night, but that's no excuse. I could have protected her, maybe I could have even been the one that he killed if I had only been sober.

The cops shot him in my doorway. I didn't even have the chance for revenge. All I could do was drop the smack after the fact. The sobriety got me nothing. I was left with a fistful of good memories of her and one unlivable memory of her end. I had started her on this path of ruin then I sat Idly by while this psycho murdered her.

I know that even if he didn't kill her I would have. Addiction is just as fatal. It was only a matter of time for either of us, but I kicked the habit for her, not that she would know now. Delusions, depression, dementia, they gave me drugs to replace the ones that I had kicked but in the end I was just substituting one drug for another and none of them helped. No amount of pharmaceutical euphoria could replace what I had actually lost.

Now here I stand as some sort of indestructible blood monster 'blood elemental' Eva says. Maybe if I can't meet Caroline I can see that psychopathic asshole again. Maybe this time I can kill him before he kills more. Maybe I can at least have my revenge.

I will look that usurper's champion in the eyes, if I see the gleam of recollection then I will strike him dead. If not, then

I will open my arms and let him do me in. I don't give two shits, one damn or half a fuck about hell's politics.

I felt a hand softly rubbing my back.

"You stupid little shit!" I yelled as I threw her arm off me.

This woman simply would not give up.

"Why can't you take a hint, you freaky-eared demoness?" I screamed at her.

She simply smiled and proceeded to try again.

I don't know how it happened but my body erupted in red spikes piercing her hand. I can't control it!

"Don't you even try to touch me! I'm not your plaything!" I yelled as she pulled her hand back in shock.

She smiled again as her blood flowed through the air into me.

"I don't care if you reject me! I will still reach out to you, you are our salvation and I won't let you self destruct." She said as she reached her now bloody hand out to me.

My body again erupted in spikes as she pushed her hand down through the pain. She touched my back and I felt a sense of pity. I'm not doing this on purpose, but she won't stop trying to touch me.

"You poor woman, I will never accept you! I won't care even if you die in some horrible way. You will never be her!" I said as my spikes turned to blades severing two of her fingers.

"I don't care." She said as she smiled at me.

She ignored the pain as she moved her face towards mine.

The blades started spinning, turning her hand into minced-meat.

"If you keep this shit up, I will kill you!" I warned, but she kept moving her face closer.

No! I won't have another woman die for me!

My blades stopped spinning as I stood there in horror. Her lips pressed against mine making me feel tarnished. My lips



were only for Caroline, they weren't for some random demon bitch, but I just couldn't bring myself to kill her.

She moved her face away and I noticed the stump where her hand used to be. I had done this! I made her bleed. I was no better than that bastard that killed her.

She smiled at me as she wrapped her hand with a piece of her robe.

"See, you didn't kill me!" She said with a victorious smile.

How can she smile so brightly when I had just maimed her. No! There is only one for me, and she is gone!

Eva's eyes clouded over as she lost her footing and started to fall. My spikes rescinded as I caught her and held her in my arms.

Why did I do that? My body just moved on it's own. I held her limp body as I was reminded of that night. Why was I alive and she was gone? She was an angel while I was the devil that drug her to hell.

Eva spasmed in my arms.

"Dammit! Not you too! I won't let another one die in front of me!" I yelled as blood flowed from me back into her. Her hand reformed as she opened her eyes to look at me.

"You're not a monster." She said weakly as her newly made hand came up to stroke my face.

"I'll never love you," was all I could say as she lost consciousness once more.

She had balls, I'll give her that but no matter what she tries I will never acknowledge her. She can never live up to what I have lost.

I picked her up in my arms. What if this is her? I pondered for a moment. What guarantee do I have that Caroline would look like herself? I don't look like myself.

I carried her surprisingly light form back into the bloody room. I thought about it and the blood in the room began to swirl in the air around me. I ordered it to flow into her and the blood moved back into her body.

She opened her eyes hazily and looked at me with adoration.

"Even if you refuse me, I am yours." She said while trying to focus her eyes on me.

"Suit yourself, fool." I said as I tossed her body into the congealed blood.

I focused on her as the blood responded to my will, flowing into her at a high speed. She gasped and struggled as it entered her, causing her to scream.

I grabbed her throat and held her head above the surface as she gasped for air.

"You are an idiot, there's no way I could believe you could be anything more than a distraction. You can't be her." I chided her.

She still managed to smile at me as I dragged her out of the ruddy substance that made up my being.

How could she still not understand, I give no fucks if she lives or dies. Yet she smiles.

She looked up at the hanging girls as she spoke. "These women gave their life for your creation, just as I would for your continued survival. To us, you are like a god! Please don't throw away their sacrifice for something trivial."

"How can you possibly call her trivial? She is my all! She is everything that matters and you are all just fools that sacrificed yourselves for nothing! I couldn't care less what your agenda is." I answered as I pulled her by her hair to look at the hanging women.

"These girls are your doing! I asked for nothing but her. Barring that I wished only to die! You took that from me! You made me live! You are the architect of my personal hell. I couldn't be bothered to give a shit if we died right now. Don't take me as some sentimental fool who falls for anyone, no matter what, you can never take her place!" I screamed at the foolish woman.

How dare she presume that I cared. I would never care! If it were ten or ten-thousand it wouldn't make a difference.

My soul only craved one.

"They were my daughters! I knew each of their names. I raised them all from orphans to mothers as I told them of your return. You are made of my sins, just as you are made of each of them. You owe me and you owe them!" she choked out as I released her to fall.

"Lady, I couldn't care less. You did this all on your own. It's you that has to live with it, just let me die." I said as I walked away.

I could hear her sobbing behind me. What an idiot, she was looking for sympathy from the wrong guy. That well had run dry a long time ago. I got the feeling that she expected me to cave with her grand gestures and feminine wiles.

Now, I need to find that 'champion' and see if he can finish the job I started.

## Chapter 10: Intruder - John

There was a strange being standing outside the cave. It seemed to be dark grey, translucent and ethereal. Parts of it were constantly breaking off and fading into the air in what looked like smoke. The only feature that stood out was two glowing, amber orbs in it's head.

As I watched it, the orbs shifted in my direction.

The girls!

I jumped into the clearing and charged at the thing. As I got within range I unhooked my weapon and swung it with all my strength at it's head.

My weapon passed harmlessly through it and I was thrown off balance. It moved in and caught me, preventing me from falling, then backed away and took a neutral stance.

What the hell is happening here? I looked it over once again. There was something familiar about it. I somehow knew now that it didn't mean me any harm.

"Girls! Are you okay?" I yelled into the cave while keeping my eyes on this strange entity.

Lina came flying out in surprise. Her face lit up like the sun as she saw me. She corrected her course and landed in my arms.

I gripped her to my chest as she wrapped her arms around my neck.

"I'm home." I said with a smile as I kissed her.

She rested her head on my shoulder as I closed my eyes and savored her warmth. I know it hasn't been that long but I missed her.

"Do you like our guardian? I made him!" She said excitedly.

Wow! I guess she unlocked something. I already knew that Bob had unknown magic waiting to come out, so it only makes sense that Lina does as well.

I caressed her and held her tightly as the rest of the girls came out of the cave.

Leera dropped a piece of meat and came running up to me. I switched Lina to one arm as Leera embraced me, burying her head in my chest. I leaned down and kissed her deeply as I felt something heavy latch onto my back.

I looked down to see a pale green arm.

I could guess who this was and I do not need a new dryad backpack.

I tried to shake her off but each time I did she just dug her nails into me deeper.

I leaned over and softly sat Lina down as she sighed in protest. Then I began spinning and shaking madly to get this damned creature off me. Finally I grabbed her arms and began to pry her off but her legs remained latched on tightly.

I sighed.

Leera walked over and began speaking to the dryad. "You, stop. Sit!"

To my surprise the dryad listened and sat on the ground obediently.

Leera walked over and began petting her head as she spoke. "Good girl!"

The dryad seemed pleased.

Just what the hell happened while I was away. I eyed Leera suspiciously.

"I'm working on her. I think someday she will be a useful person to you." She said as the dryad smiled up at her with admiration.

Soon I felt another pair of arms, followed by another.

"Hello girls, I'm glad to see you too!" I rubbed Roscia's head and patted the blonde one's back.

I could feel myself smiling again but my happiness was quickly over when I saw the other two girls laying just inside the cave. The red haired one seemed to be covered in blood from head to toe and the other one was groaning softly.

I separated myself from everyone and ran to the two injured girls.

I knelt and placed my hand on the red haired one. She had skull fractures and a contusion. Celairia had a serious concussion and wasn't responsive.

Their own people did this to them. If it wasn't for Leera's healing I'm sure they would be dead right now. That town is done! I would murder them all, string them up like hams and feed them to the goblins. I would place them in a circles so they could watch as I bashed their friend's brains in, knowing that their turn would come.

I could feel myself slipping again. I fought the urge, but I could feel my rage building.

"Why..."

I opened my eyes. I saw Celaira moving her lips, her words were almost silent.

No! I can't do anything until I fix them.

I used fleshcrafting on the red haired one. She hadn't lost any parts, just some blood. I fused my hand with her and gave her some of mine, hoping that the venom was already out of my system. Just in case I used blend, if it wasn't, then now it's a part of her.

She gasped and her eyes slowly opened as she scanned her surroundings. Almost as soon as she saw me, tears began to form.

"My mommy, she..."

I scooped her up in my arms and ran my hand through her hair as she wept.

"I know, I will take care of it. Speak no more of it." I said while trying to hide the anger in my voice.

I cradled her as her cries turned into hiccups.

"See, if you can hiccup then it means you're alive." I said with a smile.

Her eyes looked less sad but I don't know what kind of scar being betrayed by you own mother would leave on her.

She smiled back up at me with her tear stained face as she sniffled. She wiped her face with the sleeve of her shirt which left a large red smear.

I licked her face and she began giggling.

"Stop that! You're not a dog." She said as she continued to laugh.

I smiled down at her and ruffled her hair as I spoke. "Get on out of here, you're fine now. I still need to fix Celairia."

"You mean Lil'sis?" She said as she just seemed to notice who was lying beside her.

Bob and his nicknames.

"Yes, her." I responded.

She nodded with a serious expression and got up. Leera was nearby and wrapped her in a hug as she led her away asking her questions like what her favorite color was and what games she liked to play.

I turned my attention back to Celairia. She seemed somewhat lucid but I could tell she also had brain damage.

Her injuries weren't as severe, but I'm guessing a level one heal from Leera doesn't have the power to correct brain damage. I think she has to directly touch the affected part.

I used fleshcrafting and mended her injuries.

She opened her eyes, but unlike the red-haired one she didn't cry. Instead she had a look of anger that spoke volumes. "Why did they let them take us?"

She looked around the cave, her eyes focused on me as her hand found mine supporting her head. "John?"

"Yes, I'm here."

Her lip quivered slightly. "Why did our parents let them take us?"

"...When something unspeakable becomes normal, weak people break. They didn't have the willpower to stand up, so

they let you fall." I responded.

"The elder told us he had some food for us to celebrate our return, and led us off to the shed. I heard my sister scream, then everything went dark." She looked at her hand with a hazy stare. "I knew! The way they were acting I knew something was wrong, but my parents just shut the door as they led us away." She said as she clenched her hand into a fist.

"It doesn't matter now. They threw you away. I'm here, and just as I told your sister, you are now my burden. You are my daughter from this day forth and if harm should befall you, I will make them bleed. You will not know death, but you must still become strong. You will learn to fight for yourself, and kill those that would kill you." I told her in a solemn voice.

Her eyes finally misted over as she allowed her hand to fall. I caught it and held it close.

"You can't just make someone your daughter." She said as she made a stubborn face and held her tears in.

I looked into her eyes. "I just did. You are my second daughter and third disciple."

Her hand gripped mine as she allowed a single tear to escape. "Belairia is okay?"

I smiled at her. "Yes, my first daughter is happy and thriving in the goblin village. She's actually pretty strong now."

"She always was but it was usually up to me to clean up her messes. Should we really be alive? We've died twice now but you just keep..." She said as the dam burst.

I raised her up hugging her as I spoke. "I already told you, my daughters don't die. That was only a dream, you're awake now."

She cried into me as her hand squeezed mine tightly.

"But we-"

"It doesn't matter now, I will make you strong. It's up to you from here on to protect yourself and your sister."



She separated from me then wiped her face.

She looked down. "What am I wearing?"

"I'm not sure, but I'm guessing it's something that Bob made, from the looks of it." I said as I examined her trendy new outfit.

She looked like she was trapped on a deserted island with Tom Hanks.

"I'll find you new clothes soon." I said as I ran my fingers through her thick black hair.

Her and her sister both have such fluffy hair. I felt myself smile.

She looked up at me and grinned. "You're a weird dad."

"I can't help it, your hair is just so damn fluffy and cute." I ran both hands through it making it poof up on the sides.

She moved her hands up to feel it, then began laughing.

Leera walked over to us with the red haired girl holding still holding her hand. "Well, I guess you should meet your new moms." She said as she smiled at Celairia.

Yep I definitely need to get them now clothes... Clothes!?

Oh yeah.

"Ralphus, Languoria, come on over." I yelled.

Their heads popped up from the bushes. Languoria had leaves stuck in her hair and Ralphus was blushing.

"Er, well, when you're ready." I yelled again.

I guess I could use some of this tainted bear to finish restoring Ralphus.

I looked down at the red-haired girl and scooped her up. "I know you heard what I told Celairia. It applies to you as well. You're also my daughter now." I told her as she hugged me.

"Thank you father!" She smiled at me with misty eyes.

"None of that now. I've had enough crying for today." I told her as tickled her.

She giggled and no tears came as I sat her down.

I looked back at Leera and Lina, both of them were smiling. Roscia was beaming and looked excited. The blonde

girl was staring at me with trepidation.

"It's alright, um, what do I call you?" I asked the blonde girl.

"It's-"

"It's Blondie! And the red-haired girl is Wendy!" Roscia said, interrupting the blonde girl.

"Fine, call me Blondie. I can appreciate the gesture of what you're about to offer me, but I already have a family and I want to see them again." She said in a sad tone.

I looked into her eyes. "That's more than fine. I will do what I can to figure out where they are and return you to them if that is your wish. But if they should ever betray you, think of me. Pray to the darkness, and I will come."

She blushed and nodded at me.

"My turn!" Roscia exclaimed.

"Yes, your turn. Will you be my daughter?"

"I have been, you just didn't know it yet." She said with a wide smile.

I could feel Threscia in the corner of my consciousness. She seemed to be smiling just as much as her sister.

I laughed as I spoke. "Oh, is that right? And when was this decided?"

"When you calmed me down in that horrible place. I felt like I was safe for the first time in my life. I knew then that I wanted to stay with you." She said with a serious expression.

She walked over and placed my hand on her head. I stroked her long brown locks and she sighed contentedly.

Ralphus and Languoria walked over while adjusting their robes. Ralphus paused for a moment then walked back off into the forest.

Huh? I wonder what that was about.

I spoke once Languoria was within earshot. "Everyone, this is Languoria and the one that just walked off is Ralphus."

Languoria nodded as they all started exchanging greetings.

Ralphus emerged from the forest carrying the large box that used to house Languoria strapped to his back by those glowing chains.

He walked over to me and sat it down.

"I went through the trouble to bring this stuff and you just leave it in the forest? Some gratitude you have!" He said jokingly as he sat the large box down with a thud.

He opened the bag that contained the robes, book and ambers. "I see seven girls here and yourself, that makes eight, if you don't count the smoke elemental out front."

"Unfortunately I only brought four robes, and a roll of extra fabric for mending."

I looked at all the girl's clothing. The dryad seemed to have fashioned her own outfit out of leaves, but honestly it didn't look bad on her. Leera and Lina were still wearing their furs, but they appeared to already be falling apart. Blondie was fine, as she had a long shirt and pants and Roscia still looked like she was wearing an ugly dress.

That leaves Wendy and Celairia in dire need of new clothes with Leera and Lina as the next in line. I bet I could make Lina something out of the extra fabric though, so maybe Roscia could use the robes.

I took and unrolled one of the robes. They were black, but not glowing in the typical necromancer style. They were large, I could tell that they had been provided with me in mind but I'm not the robe-wearing sort. Either way they would swallow up any of the girls. I could just see them tripping every other step in these things.

"You said you had tools for mending in here?" I asked him.

He dug around a while and brought out a small wooden needle and a large spool of black thread.

Celaira was probably the worst of them. I walked around to each of the four of them and took their measurements

with the thread.

"Alright, why don't all of you go to the river and get cleaned up while I make you new clothes. Blondie, you and the dryad should be fine with the clothes you have, but maybe it wouldn't hurt to wash that shirt in the river."

"Ralphus and Languoria, if you don't mind, would you go with them, it's just about an hours walk north of here if you go straight. I need you to keep them safe." I said as I noticed Lina giving me a strange look.

"Ah, you and Leera as well, as their mothers." I added at the end as they smiled.

Ralphus nodded and they all started making their way into the forest. I knew with Ralphus and Languoria around they would be safe. After all Ralphus could sever my arm with almost no effort in the span of a split second and it was daylight so most of the dangerous stuff wasn't likely to come out for a while. They would mainly need to look out for bears and Lina doesn't have any problem dispatching those.

I sat down with the robes and the strings I used for measurement and got to work on modifying them. Dipshit must have been a good tailor as I seemed to know what I was doing. I paused to Break off a rib from the bear. I formed it into a small thin, serrated blade so I could cut the fabric. I then resumed my task as time slipped away.

Soon I heard giggling behind me and saw Blondie wearing soaking wet clothes. The shirt had actually turned a lighter shade of brown. Lina stood a few feet in front of her and blew out a warm burst of air that I could actually feel from here. Blondie cursed and covered her eyes with her hands as her shirt actually appeared to get slightly dryer. Leera ran up to Blondie and breathed out some of her healing fog and Blondie shook her fist at Lina as Lina apologized.

I noticed that Ralphus seemed to be missing his cloak again, but soon saw Wendy wrapped in it. That's good, I was

worried that she would put that bloody shirt back on and undo all the washing she just went through.

"Alright girls, I made each of you some new clothes!" They came barreling in and I handed each of them their clothes. I then stepped outside with the adults and Blondie to let them get dressed.

I handed Lina the new cloth outfit I had made for her. It was in similar form to her fur-kini. There really wasn't any other style that would work considering her wings. Fur was a bit fluffier and had concealed her form, but now with fabric I could see the contours of her body. I let myself look her over for a minute as she blushed and returned my stares.

For Leera I converted the robes into a dress though not a traditional one. The dress itself went down to just above her knees. I made it low cut and added slits to the sides to give her more mobility. It was a little tight and definitely sexy. I also kept the hood that the robes had on the back. I still feel like she needs pants, though this will do for now. She can probably get pants and shoes when we return to the goblin village.

Leera smiled up at me and stood on her tiptoes to kiss me.

They're both so beautiful, if the young ones weren't here I have no doubt in my mind what we'd be doing now.

"I'm ready!" I heard Roscia's voice say as she stepped out in front of me.

She spun around happily showing off her new outfit.

For her outfit, instead of simply trimming off the extra fabric I turned the bottoms of the robe into a ruffled dress. I kept the long sleeves and simply folded them back and sewed them in place. She also had a hood for when things turned cold.

"Looks good! But there's more." I said as I grabbed her shoulders and turned her away from me.

I gathered her long hair into two ponytails and tied it with some extra fabric that I had sewn into a set of bows.

She beamed up at me as she hugged my waist.

"Me too!" Wendy said as she came running out of the cave.

For her I cut off the bottom of the robes and sewed them together creating pantaloons. The down side to this however is that she needed to enter from top, then tie the front. She didn't do a very good job of that however and it was just a big knotted mess.

"Here, let me fix that for you." I told her as I re-tied the front into a large bow.

She looked down at it and smiled.

"Thanks father!"

She looked over at Roscia. "Do I get hair bows too?"

"Of course!" I turned her around and tied her hair up into pigtails.

She turned around and hugged me.

Ahh, that's why Bob called her Wendy.

Finally Celairia came out. She was smiling a fiendish grin as she looked over her outfit.

I kept the necromancer robe's shape and form, forgoing the girly enhancements I had made for the other two. I used some of the scrap fabric and added a mantle spiked with upturned bones that I had gathered from the bear. I added another layer on her hood making it pointed forward in the middle. Though I had hemmed the sleeves to fit at about the middle of her forearm I left the excess to hang. The only girly modification I made was to bring the waist in so that it had more of a dress shape then the baggy robe look. I had used the some bone to make a decorative skull buckle for her black belt so she could adjust it as she got bigger. If she was anything like her sister she still had a growth spurt on the way.

"How did you know?" She asked.

"When a soul is inside me, it gives me an impression of it's character. I also thought a lot about your personality. You don't seem like the sunshine and rainbow type. That and

your desire to get stronger, to become dangerous. It inspired me."

She smiled at me and gave me a hug with all her might, popping my back.

Yep, they're definitely sisters. I can already tell that I'm going to be re-assembling her boyfriends some day. Though by goblin customs she may never have one as they would have to beat her.

I moved her hood back and ruffled her hair. No bows for this one.

With all the reductions to the robes I hadn't actually had to touch the spare bolt of fabric much. I could probably put something together for Blondie as well.

"Blondie? Do you want me to make something for you?"

She looked up at me with twinkling eyes. I could tell she felt a little jealous after seeing my work.

"No ballroom gowns however or you won't be able to move through these woods."

She looked let down, but then perked back up as she spoke. "What about something to cover up this horrible shirt?"

I thought about it for a while. "Yeah, I think I can do something there."

I gathered up a few of the larger scraps and cut a large piece of fabric from the bolt.

I made her a layered poncho with frayed ends that I tied back together. I'm not sure if this world has these, but I can guess that they probably don't have them in a girlish style.

I handed it over to her.

She examined the poncho, "how do you put it on?"

"Easy, just put your head through the hole then move it until it's comfortable."

She put it on and looked down at it with a pleased expression then spun around watching it spin up around her as she laughed.

"This thing is kinda fun! It's definitely different." She said as she came to a stop.

"Something is missing though. Turn to the side."

She too had long unbound hair, in fact only Threscia's hair could be considered longer.

I broke off another piece of bone from the bear.

"Mors, I want to make an ivory silhouette using her profile. However, use my memories of Victorian nobility to dress it up a bit. That way it can be something she can still wear even when she's back home."

Mors took control and the bone flattened out into an oval shape. Recesses began to form and soon Blondie's profile appeared. It had its hair curled up and she was wearing the top of a high class Victorian dress and bustier.

I made a series of holes around the perimeter within the relief and sewed it onto a strip of fabric.

I handed it to her.

She marveled at it as she ran her finger over it. "This is beautiful! Is that me?"

"Yes, I thought that a noble lady should have a noble gift. It's for tying up your hair." I said as she reached around and gathered up the top layer of her hair behind her and tied it.

Now at least her hair was out of her eyes. She was quite a pretty girl, I had no doubt that someday she would break some noble's heart.

I smiled at her.

She smiled back at me as I pulled her in for a hug.

"It looks good on you, hopefully you can wear it proudly as a gift from your godfather." I said as she hugged me back.

"Definitely!"

"Now then, let's all go back into the cave, we have business to discuss." I said as I ushered them all into the cave.

Lina walked back over to the entrance and blew out another smoke elemental. Before running back to us.



## Chapter 11: Busy Night - John

I started telling the story of the past two days. I let the girls fill in their parts as I answered questions here and there, mainly from Ralphus. It seems like the girls had already told Their story before as Leera and Lina listened with sad expressions.

I resumed my telling when we got to the part about the Goblin village. Lina and Leera looked furious when I told them of Athen's death, then they were relieved as I told them I was able to bring him back. I also told them he was our son officially now and they seemed touched.

I turned my attention back to Ralphus. "So, what can you add to this? Do you know who this Thads is?"

"The academy is to the west, about two days walk without magic or mounts. We don't know much about the rest of the world as we keep to ourselves, what with being a secret order and such. But I was aware of the Duke's Son's offer, and also of the famine in this area. The Duke is terrible at his job. He's taxing the void out of his people, just to keep up appearances in the duchy. I'm guessing that he thinks he can just usurp his brother and leave this place to rot."

"I will pay the Duke back one day as well, but for now, how does this relate to Thads?"

"Thads, huh. That name is unknown to me, but it does remind me of another. The Duke had a real bastard of a torturer a few years back. A real cocky piece of work, at one point you couldn't mention the Duke without his name coming up. They called him Thadeus and from what I've heard today it may be the same person. He also rendered people limbless. It was his signature. Though a rumor spread that the Duke had him dealt with secretly. I just don't

see why you would let someone like that live after all the public outcry." Ralphus spoke with a distant expression as if processing something.

I gave him the time to think as all eyes were on him. I could see Roscia and Celairia were fuming. Blondie looked shocked, could she have some relation to the Duke?

"I think you may need to go to Therograd and poke around. If he returned there, then there are probably several assassins waiting for him. Some of the people he tortured where nobles themselves and their families have enough clout to have him put down. Your victim may already be dead by the time you get there."

I laughed. "That won't spare him for long. All I need is his head."

Ralphus went pale. "I forgot about your torch comment earlier... You know that's considered the ultimate taboo of our order. Just letting someone burn while being aware... It's just horrible."

I felt myself smiling again. "It is, isn't it."

"Indeed, think of all that wasted soul energy. It's a travesty." Ralphus shook his head.

I laughed, "huh, I didn't think that was the direction you were going with that."

"I'm no follower of the light, and looking at these girls faces when you described everything. How bright their eyes became when you spoke of the men's fates. I can understand why you did it, but you're letting an opportunity escape you by not tapping into their energy. Read that damned book! If you think your goblin army is good now, just think of what they could accomplish with even a few necromancer spells each and a good supply of soul energy." He said with a nod.

"To put it in perspective, my whip can be used a good twenty or so times with the soul of one rat. A human soul might yield a lifetime of use with proper rationing and only a few battles."

"Is your whip spell in this book?"

He took it from me and opened it to the last page. He pulled a small black vial and a feather from his robes. He began writing at a fast, practiced, rate and was finished in just a few moments.

"It is now! They don't actually need to chant 'Ralphus is great' while they use it, but I would encourage it." He said as he puffed out his chest.

I laughed. "Why not, it's a Ralphus original anyway."

I infused a piece of Amber with the soul of a violated monstrous bear.

"Ralphus? Would you mind taking this and showing the girls your spell, I need to talk with my mates for a minute." I said as I tossed him the filled Amber.

"Oh, talk is it? Like how Languoria and I talked in the bushes earlier." He said as he started to laugh. A hand slapped his face, stopping him mid-chuckle as Languoria shot me an apologetic look and dragged Ralphus outside.

The girls followed them with confused expressions as they exited the cave leaving me alone with Leera, Lina and the dryad.

Leera stared at me hungrily as she exhaled a bit of fog. Lina sat in my lap and ground her ass against my quickly stiffening twins.

"Not so fast girls, there's something I need to tell you about what awaits you in the Goblin Village." I said as I began moving my hips against Lina.

"I will need to claim you publicly as my mates. There will also be two others I will be claiming."

Leera looked surprised but intrigued and I could feel Lina's hot body pressed against me as she began to breath harder.

Lina reached down and untied my pants letting my twins free.

"Three others." Leera said as she gestured at the dryad.

"Oh no, that won't be happening." I said as I felt something extremely hot and wet sliding down one of the twins.

I looked down to see Lina in full blush looking up at me with lewd eyes as she lowered herself slowly on me.

Leera raised her dress up and bit it as she lifted Lina's legs and lowered herself as well. She allowed it to slip as she gasped.

I leaned in and began to kiss her as I enjoyed the connection we all shared. Our tongues explored each other's mouths as I could feel her start to move.

The dryad looked on with a complicated expression as she allowed her hands to explore her body.

I felt Lina start to shiver as I heard her small moans grow louder.

I nibbled Leera's ear before making my way down her neck. I could feel her shudder as I began to lick and suck her.

"Please, for me. I've been working with her, she saved Lina." She said between breaths.

She motioned the dryad over as she began moving her hips with force. letting our flesh slam together.

Lina let out a small whimper as she was forced up and down.

I pushed Lina's clothes out of the way as I began squeezing her breasts and pinching her nipples between my fingers. I pushed her down until I felt there was no more room as I began to grind myself inside of her.

Her moans became shouts as her hands grabbed my wrists. I felt her clamp down on me as her body began to shake.

As I looked at Leera I could see her eyes staring back at me, returning my hungry gaze. I could tell she wasn't that far behind Lina.

Lina released a final moan as her orgasm overtook her and her body writhed against mine.

This seemed to drive Leera over the edge as she hugged us both tightly letting herself cum. I felt myself getting close as their insides massaged my engorged twins.

I began moaning as well as they stopped moving.

Leera released me and separated herself, taking Lina with her and not allowing me to finish.

I gave her a pleading look as she stood on shaky legs and forced the dryad down on me.

The dryad had a confused look on her face as Leera used all her strength to force me inside her.

The dryad's once green skin was now showing with a hint of pink as her face became a portrait of ecstasy as I entered both her holes. The twins still slick with Lina and Leera's juices.

Leera backed off and lay back as Lina began to lick her.

The dryad sat there on top of me not moving as we looked into each other's eyes each a little nervous and confused.

I could still feel myself so close to coming that it didn't matter anymore. I embraced her as I pushed myself deep inside of her. She let out a long moan as her muscles groped me and her eyes searched mine for approval.

I hungrily kissed her as I began to move my hips once more. I pushed her forward as I lay on top of her. I pressed myself in as deeply as I could stretching her limits as my cocks throbbed inside of her with each stroke.

I slammed into her showing her no remorse as I began to bite her shoulder and neck. She began to moan loudly as her arms held me close with all their strength.

She wrapped her legs around me as I could feel her limits give way.

I looked into her orange eyes as I came inside of her. Her mouth opened as her breathing quickened.

Her body began to quiver around me as I emptied myself. She bit her lip and I soon felt her walls shaking as she began bucking her hips against me in orgasm.

I pressed down on her with all my weight as my seed began to spill from her making a puddle under us.

She leaned forward and we shared a long kiss as our bodies bathed in pleasure.

I finally felt my orgasm end with one last spurt as her legs stopped shaking. We just lay there with me on top of her as we continued to kiss and caress each other.

It was hard to believe this was the same dryad who tried to kill me in the forest, something about her was different now.

She looked into my eyes as she spoke. "I'm sorry John, for everything..." She said with a sad expression.

"I can see now, that you saved me. My world was so small before you, safe, but small. I don't know what love is. I know I don't feel the same about you as they do, but I've never been alive before." She looked lovingly at Leera who was now relaxing with Lina on the opposite wall.

She gave me the first genuine smile I had ever seen from her. "I like her, and in time I think I may like you as well."

I kissed her again for some time before resting my head on her ample chest. She brought her hands up and began to stroke my head and back as I just enjoyed the feeling.

I listened to her heartbeat, "I guess I will have to claim you now... Leera's a clever one. Somehow she always seems to get what she wants."

"She is someone who is special to us both. I feel bad when I think that I tried to take you from her and the little one. Just how many mates have I taken from women like this I wonder." She said in a sad voice.

"That was a mighty tree, I can only guess. Not all men are good. You may have very well saved just as many women."

I felt her arms as she hugged my head to her chest. I looked up at her as she smiled back down at me as her eyes started to mist over.

She really has come a long way in a short amount of time. I think she's now starting to understand that not everything is about her.

I pushed myself up onto my arms as I admired her. She was beautiful. It was a face and a body designed for only one purpose. To entice and kill men and I'm sure it worked well until the day I met her.

I ran my fingers through her red hair, the hair I had given her.

"Even though I hate to, I will name you." I told her as she looked at me with a questioning expression.

Let's see here, her tree was kind of like a cross between a giant redwood and a pine tree... Redpina... No, damn I suck at this. Come on think. Pine, fur. Fura.

"I name you Fura, take it as a symbol that you are now my mate." I said as we shared another kiss.

I looked at her as she smiled at me. Her skin had now lost it's slight green color and had become a paler, similar to mine. I guess she still drains me, though at least this time it wasn't my blood.

"Leera, he name me Fura." She said happily, in English now.

"Mors, how is it that she can speak English?"

"I'm not sure master, I can only guess that copying the ones she has mated with is second nature to her. Maybe it's some sort of passive magic she has, like a way to better lure in future prey."

Leera looked at Fura in astonishment.

"How long have you been able to speak like that?" Leera said.

"After we mate, it all somehow seem clearer." Fura replied.

We all got dressed as Fura's leaves just moved themselves back into place.

I guess that solves that mystery.

We exited the cave to see Ralphus standing behind Celairia.

Celairia held the amber in her hand as she chanted.

She moved her hand forward shooting out some sort of flaming green projectile as Languoria clapped her hands.

I walked up to stand beside him.

"This one's a natural. You should let me take her to the Academy with me, I think she would go far there." He said as he watched her chanting again.

"I might let her do that someday if she wants to, but for now I'm not entrusting my daughter's fate to anyone else."

He nodded to me in understanding as he moved forward behind her and began instructing her on something new.

I walked over to Languoria.

"Do you know anything about death magic?" I asked.

"Quite a bit actually. It's archaic and is now only seen in diluted forms such as the lich transformation which is actually several different magics combined. True death magic on it's own hasn't been seen centuries. It's practitioners are always wiped out almost as soon as they spring up by the followers of Theressa and before that Rosereth. Somehow they always seem to find them, it's creepy." She said as she looked up at me brows raised.

"What was it like?" I asked her.

"Death magic by itself is said to be explosive and terrifying. It's known to be hard to control and is just as likely to kill the caster as the target. In a way I think that's how it first came to be called death magic. Each and every example I read about is designed to kill rather than just damage. Imagine a fireball that didn't just burn and destroy, but instead poisoned and caused disease that could be spread. Eventually it wouldn't just be your enemies that were dying, your own people would start to get sick as well. The only thing that could stop it would be to kill everyone there, then yourself. That's why even in the academy the only death magic there is, is diluted with soul magic. If you



tether it so a definite source it wont jump from person to person. Why do you ask?"

"I might be learning some soon." I told her as her brows threatened to disappear into her hairline.

"You just keep seeming more and more dangerous. I'm shocked that Theressa's minions haven't shown up yet. You should come with us to the academy. There it's safe from prying eyes, even a god's vision can't penetrate our veil. Dark magic of the highest order surrounds everything, then they add on a layer of illusion magic. If you don't have someone initiated to guide you, it will send you in circles until you give up or die." She responded as her brows returned to rest above her eyes.

"I might pay you a visit there someday, but for now, there are many other things I must do." I responded as I looked back towards Celairia.

She was now using Ralphus's bound soul whip to cut down trees as the other girls clapped.

"Alright everyone, today we're moving. Pack up your things, we're going to the goblin village before nightfall." I yelled.

Ralphus came towards me and spoke. "Is it alright if Lang and I come with you tonight? I'm sure I could get her back to the academy myself, and she's no slouch but I really just want to spend some alone time with her before she gets mercilessly questioned by the masters. It's not every day someone long-dead returns and I think this may even overshadow Bearz's transformation."

"Of course, but Goblin culture might be a little shocking to you. I think you'll adjust quickly, however, try not to kill any of them." I informed him.

I walked back towards the cave and picked up the box Ralphus had given me. Even though I had loaded it with everything, it was actually quite light. I wasn't sure what those chains did or how they worked but I was glad to have them.

I looked over at the bear carcass. Oh yeah.

"Ralphus! If you wanted, we could use this bear to finish restoring your muscle." I yelled to him.

"I think I've had enough pain for today thanks." He called back.

He's right, the bear isn't human and I would have to use Blend again. From what I've seen that is itself the single most painful thing someone has to go through when I use fleshcrafting on them.

Everyone began to gather behind me as I lead the way to our destination.

## Chapter 12: The Crusade Continues.

We had conscripted everyone we could from the royal capital of Theross. The children that Barneth had tutored now seemed sullen. They had been so cheerful and full of life that first day, but now they all seemed to be husks of their former selves.

I began to doubt his motives. I remember that my training was hard. Self healing involved self harm in grievous ways. What exactly is involved in learning to heal others? Barneth however maintained his immaculate smile as we moved on to the surrounding villages.

I hated the fact that I had to give up my name to become Theressa's champion as having any name at all would threaten to undermine Theressa's glory. I was only moving because of her, and all my actions were supposed to be by her hands. I hated this one aspect of serving her but she had given me so much.

My operation in the poor quarter was a resounding success, I had gained no fewer than a thousand slaves. The slave masters had simply dissolved from the sigil's power to forever suffer in Theressa's realm of pain.

My attempts at getting the masses trained had been a failure as most were injured or even killed in the attempts. I still held out hope for the ones that remained as they seemed strong. This march would also be a training exercise for the ones that hadn't yet seen proper training as running to keep up with the riders would prove challenging even though we were only going at a trot.

These outlying villages would only yield a few, as they themselves didn't have many they could spare. I dared not use the sigil on them out of fear of killing every man who

was just trying to protect the well-being of his family by staying to plow the fields.

So far we've only gotten a handful of men and young teens from these villages. The whole region seemed to be suffering from a famine. Rainfall had diminished gradually the past few years and the crops had paid the price. I wondered why Theresa allowed this to happen to her devoted people. Why had she allowed them to suffer and die? My own village wasn't far from here and soon I would visit it to beg my family to spare who they could.

We were nobles, but we weren't so removed from the others that we didn't struggle. We too had a farm, which produced grapes and wine. Our wine was well loved in the surrounding kingdoms and we had been making it for generations. My family had grown rich from it and we were granted our nobility by it's virtues. I wasn't sure how much longer our fortunes would last with our diminishing stock.

I thought about my siblings, each male was sent to the royal capital to serve as royal guard or even as standard infantry. My father had several wives and several mistresses, thereby insuring my line. He was always sure to spend time with each of us teaching us of the merits of farming and the glory of our goddess.

He told me at an early age that it's not just about the grape it's about the preparation. Each batch must be ripe. If you move too soon you risk making a sour wine, and if you move too late you risk losing your crop. Preparation is Key to all things in life.

I can't help but think that I've rushed things. My recruits were all sour, snatched from the vine too early. They would never mature into good soldiers. I worried about our overall strength. Our equipment was sub-par. Even with the nobility's contributions most of my men still carried things like converted scythes and pikes made of pitchforks.

Our food was also running low. We were in the middle of a famine, how could Theresa think that we'd be able to

feed an army. Just how removed is the goddess from our struggles? I've had to make some tough decisions along the way that left villages without their winter stores. I had no doubt that when I returned here next the only thing left to greet me would be corpses. Starved mothers holding their suckling babes to dry teats. Is this really the world that Theressa provides for her people?

My worries must have shown on my face as Barneth came to comfort me.

"The Goddess moves for the good of the many, she thinks only of humankind's survival. Though we may rob these fine people of their lives, we feed her faithful." He said in reverence.

"Of course my brother!" I said though my heart wasn't in it.

Soon we would be upon my village, and soon I would be robbing my own family of their chances for survival. I would be conscripting my own kin to die. It just didn't sit right with me. All to kill this vague evil that would what? Consume everything? Consume as our army has been doing?

I would see this 'evil' being. Was it truly so destructive? Why then, have we not heard anything from Therograd? Is this evil really such a threat to merit this much sacrifice?

Theressa had been good to me, but now she was forcing me to make the ultimate sacrifice. My very identity, my family, and my reason for being, all to bind this, thing.

What I wouldn't give to have been born a Garanthi. To live to worship honor. To die, not for some deity but because you know it's for the good of your own people.

My holy glow had softened as we neared my village. I had heard rumors of the church of Rosereth's ambitions during these hard times. Their followers had doubled as the followers of Theressa hadn't been able to stop this famine.

I hated this but it was for the good of my goddess. If nothing else I needed to have faith in her. I had to believe

that she truly wished for her followers to survive and that this dark god was a threat to us all.

I instructed our nobles to continue the training on their charges as we formed a circle around my village.

I can't lose my faith, if I do then what else is left to me. I brought out my sigil and prepared to enter my family estates. I can only hope that they comply.

## Chapter 13: Rally - John

We arrived at the goblin village a few hours later. The whole time the girls, now my adopted daughters were laughing and playing as we traveled. I was carrying Wendy on my shoulders. It wasn't that she was tired, she just wanted to be picked up for a better view. I felt her light weight as she laughed and grabbed leaves off the trees as we passed.

The whole time there was only one thing going through my mind. They tried to kill her.

They did kill Belairia, and odds are if the other two had returned or if Bob didn't investigate things, then I may never have known. Such precious lives would have ended without so much as a whimper, snuffed out by their own families.

A parent's job is to protect their children, and put their needs above their own. These people had shit on that idea and turned it into some horrendous mockery. They sacrificed their own to feed themselves.

I could feel my muscles stiffen with each step as I felt that old familiar sensation bubbling up from inside me, threatening to boil me alive.

I could feel the dark god smiling, just out of reach. I knew that I wouldn't be able to wait as I had wanted. Today was nice, there for a while. I was temporarily able to delude myself into believing that things were alright.

But I now know that this grim task cannot wait. There are more children in that town, like these girls. This shitty Duke and these stubborn people, they are the cause of their own misfortune.

We broke through the forest and entered the outer clearing of the goblin village. Many of the goblins were passed out in a pile. Somewhere still drinking and joking

while Red and Blue where doing something with several long thin trees. I walked over towards them to get a better look. They were using swords to shape them and form makeshift spears with daggers.

Liz and Nex were nowhere to be seen, but Reginauld, Belairia and Athen were all training. Belairia seemed to be keeping her own against the two of them with her tentacles. It was a strange sight.

I felt a rush of wind and felt soft lips pressed against my cheek.

"Welcome back John are these two the ones you were talking about earlier?" Liz said as she glanced around eyeing Leera and Lina with interest.

Nex jumped off of her back and tossed sticks at Leera and Lina both. Leera caught it between two fingers like it had always been there and Lina dodged at the last second while shooting out her spike and giving Nex a look of rage.

"Not half bad." Nex said as a man made of smoke grabbed her from behind.

"Hey! What are you doing?" She protested as the elemental restrained her arms behind her back and forced her to her knees.

"Stop!" I yelled as Lina charged Nex.

She stopped mid stride and looked up at me, her anger giving way to fear as she saw my expression.

"I will not have you all attacking one another! We are a family now. Lina, let her go." I said as I breathed out slowly in frustration.

Lina nodded and the smoke elemental stood aside, allowing Nex to stand.

"My love, I am sorry, I was only testing them." She said with a hurt expression.

In her eyes, she was only doing what was natural in her culture but I didn't feel like going through this just yet. My mind was focused on a single goal. The Human Town and its inhabitants.



"You are all equal. You can train and test one another later, but tonight we still have work to do." I told her as I caressed her cheek with my hand.

"Where's Bob?" I asked.

"We were racing in the forest. We lost him just before you arrived." Liz replied as she pointed into the trees.

"Bob!" I yelled.

I felt another gust of wind as a pair of glowing red eyes appeared in front of me.

"Boss! Good to see ya." He said as he looked at the girls. "Wendy! Lil'sis! You're both okay." He said as he lifted them into the air and swung them around, falling on his back in the process.

The girls laughed as they crawled off of him. He rolled back over and looked at me.

"Judging from that look on your face I'm guessin' it's time to pay the town a visit." He said as an eerie grin slowly appeared on his face.

"Oh yes my friend. Gather everyone, tell them we go before nightfall." I said as my smile grew to match his.

I walked over to the sleeping pile of goblins.

"Rise! Soon, we go to our new home. Soon, we take a town!" I yelled as they began to stir.

As they realized what was happening they began to take up their weapons. There were a few that were still in a drunken stupor but I knew they would be okay. They had already been through enough suffering at the hands of humans, now it was time to dish out some of their own.

They began to gather at where the bonfire was the night before as Bob corralled the stragglers.

I grabbed Celairia's hand and led her out towards where her sister was training with Reginauld and Athen.

As we got close they stopped training and stared at us. I stopped and looked down at Celairia. Her eyes were misted over as she looked at Belairia. I could feel her gripping my

hand nervously. I released her and gave her a shove into Belairia's arms.

The two sisters cried and embraced one another before Belairia smiled a goofy smile. Celairia snorted and the two of them started laughing. They began talking to each other happily as they walked back towards the village together.

Reginauld and Athen came over to me as we watched the sisters walk away.

It wasn't even twilight yet, but I couldn't skip on their magic training.

"Reginauld, is there a building around here that is big enough to house all three of us for a short while?" I asked.

"Indeed, my house should work." He said as he guided us to his home.

Athen and I had to practically crawl to get in, then duck to avoid the ceiling once inside.

This is good, it's dark in here. I found a lump of straw and sat down.

"Alright, we don't have time for a proper lesson, so this will be more of a demonstration." I activated Dark Shroud as I finished speaking.

They both gawked at me.

"Wow, you disappeared!" Athen marveled.

"Dark Shroud doesn't really make you invisible, it just covers you in darkness, helping you blend into dark areas. It also makes it harder for opponents to see your weapons or strike your vulnerable areas. To use it, try feeling the power inside yourself, then try to reach out with it. Imagine you're filling everything around you with darkness." I said as they listened intently.

They both sat down as I had done.

I didn't really want to train them at the moment, but my gobs needed time to assemble and shake off their stupor. I was about to demand a march that would probably take us a day and a half without rest based on Bob's description of the town's location. I also wanted the two of them to

become stronger. There are evil people in this world and my people would need to be in top condition to withstand the inevitable onslaught. There was a massive bias against goblins and Thads was still out there somewhere, probably plotting his revenge. I was plotting mine as well, we'll see who moves first.

Athen was the first to succeed, though success might not be the right word. He was able to make himself slightly darker but the area around himself seemed to be shifting around. Torrents of dark energy where rippling and folding around him.

I wasn't sure what this was, but it wasn't Dark Shroud. I reached out towards him and his eyes shot open.

"I felt that!" He said as he looked at me in astonishment.

"Well, it's not the same as mine but I think you've come up with something here. Keep practicing on our way to the human town." I said as I moved closer and gave him a pat on his shoulder.

I looked over to Reginauld who was focusing so hard that he seemed to be in pain. His body started to darken. His skin itself seemed to be turning black as his breathing became strained. He opened his eyes and life sense activated. For any who saw his current state he would seem like a demon. He exhaled a black fog that seemed to encompass him as his muscles tensed. He began to growl as the blackness formed into tight areas around his chest and arms becoming something almost tangible.

Black spikes burst from his small frame as I jumped back and threw Athen out of harm's way.

"Reginauld! You have to focus. Get it under control!" I yelled as his eyes snapped to me.

He blinked several times and the blackness subsided while he regained control of his senses.

"Sorry, I... I believe I lost myself there for a moment." He said as he looked at us apologetically.

I should have realized that Reginauld would have a well of darkness inside himself, considering what he had been through. It wasn't sadness as it was with most, it was rage. He had seen his family burned in front of him. His darkness was dangerous and destructive.

"It's good to have you back. I've been there before but the ones that did this to your family are just heads now, they can't hurt anyone. You should practice in small amounts, preferably in isolation. What you have there is dangerous to everyone, you need to be careful with it." I told him as I patted him on the shoulder.

"Now, pull yourself together, we have humans to educate." I said as I exited the dwelling.

I walked back towards my men as I felt the ground shaking. I looked up and saw Red approaching me. I stopped to see what he had to say.

"My Lord, you shouldn't march tonight. The men aren't in any shape for an extended excursion. They are still drunk and untrained. If we should encounter any foes on our trip we may have casualties." He said in his booming voice.

"I'm in agreement but don't underestimate them. They are strong, I made them that way. They can handle this march and the dangers that come with it." I replied.

He looked at me for a moment as if thinking before speaking again. "Then at least assign officers, we need a leadership structure to keep everyone organized."

"Understood." I said as I continued towards my goblin army.

They were all gathered in a large disorganized group chatting to each other. Some were still eating or drinking.

I cleared my throat and then spoke up. "Come to the clearing and form a line! Keep an arms length from the person by you!"

They followed and started to form a jagged line that gradually became a semicircle. I must have more than fifty goblins here. I needed to start sorting them into groups.

"The young, and their mothers need to form a group over here." I yelled as I gestured to a spot behind me. I had no intention of making them fight.

I looked around until I spotted Leera and Fura.

"Leera, Fura, and my daughters, you will be responsible for keeping them safe!" I said as I grabbed Leera and Fura's hands and guided them over to the group of mothers.

Next I looked at the line and began picking the hardest looking goblins, including the one that inexplicably had a full beard. I still don't remember making a bearded goblin, but I went through so many creations at once earlier that I honestly have no idea what I made.

"Blue, help them make shields and spears. These will be the Phalanx." I said as I gestured to Blue. The strong looking men, as well as Bob's mate joined Blue as he led them towards the forest, likely to find wood for crafting.

I looked over the remaining goblins, I still had quite a few. I began picking out the leaner, faster looking ones as well as the ones that had chosen daggers as their main weapons.

"You lot will go with Athen. You will be my assassins, and my scouts." I told them as Athen puffed out his chest and began to lead them towards the back.

There were still quite a few able bodied females and young male goblins present. I pulled them as well as the ones that had taken the archer's bows to replace their own.

"Go to Nex and Liz, you will be my ranged unit." I said as I gestured towards Nex and Liz.

Finally I was left with my older, more grizzled gobs. This group included Reginald and the older one who seemed to understand my intentions earlier.

"This group will be my elite squad. Go to Red and begin discussing tactics." I said as I gestured to the surprised Red.

I was left with a handful of oddballs. Some were unarmed, some had scars that they must have told Mors to keep, and some had improvised stone and bone weapons that they kept instead of taking the steel from the bandits.

They were the ones with pride, the ones who had earned their trophies through battle and hardship and refused to let them go.

"You that remain will be part of my personal group. We will likely be acting as shock troops, or diversions. You will probably die a few times each time we fight. But the glory will always be yours." I said as I took them over to where Bob, Lina, Ralphus and Languoria were.

"Woah, I never said I was joining your army!" Ralphus protested as Languoria punched him in the arm. "We owe him! What right do you have to refuse."

"It will only be for a while. I'm sorry, but I can't overlook what has happened. That town needs to be corrected or there will be more girls like my daughters. You've met them, do you think they deserved their fates?" I asked as he placed his mask back on.

A look of resolve shown in his eyes as he spoke. "No, they didn't. I will help you, just this once."

Languoria hugged him from the side as she spoke. "There he is. He may be sweet, but his family is feared all throughout the magic world. Ralphus Obitus, he isn't a noble but to face him or his family means death, even if they die, their foes die with them."

I smiled at them. "Welcome Ralphus Obitus. You are now a member of my family as well and soon we will show them what it means to face us."

Bob hugged me from the side. "There he is, he may be sweet, but he is feared all throughout the cave. Two-Dong John, He isn't even a noble but to face him-" I punched him before he could finish his speech.

Bob grabbed his nose and snorted as he laughed. Ralphus just looked at Bob in amazement.

"Not that I should be surprised by anything you've done, but what the hell is that. And what are your large multicolored friends over there? I don't recognize these

creatures." Ralphus said, while thankfully ignoring Bob's joke.

"That, is a Bob, he's my friend, and I use that term loosely in this case. The two giants are Oni. That's something from the mythology of my original world, I recreated them here."

"Your original world? That's something we haven't talked about yet. I hope you'll tell me your story at some point, though I know that now isn't the time. Maybe after all this is done you could come back with us to the academy for a while and chat. Baerz would be also be happy to see you again."

"Your wanting me to come back with you wouldn't have anything to do with the undead fights would it?" I asked with a smile.

"...Maybe a little, we could make a fortune! You would have to make yourself look a little more undead first though." Ralphus said while avoiding eye contact.

"I'll consider it, but I have much to do. It may be some time before I get a break to have some fun." I responded while cracking my knuckles.

Thads must die! I won't rest until I accomplish that much at least. I'm sure I could leave my gobs in Reginauld's care, but as long as that man draws breath my daughters will not be free of their past. They will not have closure, and that's something that I can't allow. It might sound altruistic but I am selfish. I would be doing this for my benefit. Even if they were to get on hands and knees and beg for him to be spared, there would be no way. He was an existence that I just couldn't stomach. In a way, we were the same. We both got pleasure from others' suffering, we had both tortured and murdered for our own reasons. Perhaps the reasons were the only difference.

Red, Reginauld and my goblin elites all started heading my way. I broke off my conversation with Ralphus and began walking towards them.

"Chief!" Reginauld yelled as we neared each other. "We need to discuss a few things. We feel that it would be more prudent if the men trained in their groups for tonight. They need to get a feel for their roles and get used to acting as a unit. Blue's group is a good example, you would have them make shields and spears, then expect to know how to form a defense. They need to be trained on how to carry their weapons and perform their formations or they will die without being of use to you."

It wasn't hard to see where these concerns actually came from. The thought of waiting was like a spear in my side. It left me feeling bitter, but I could see the reasons. I wasn't a fool, and I didn't want my gobs to die feeling helpless and discouraged by my lead.

"Very well, we train for six hours, then sleep for six more. Tomorrow at first light we depart. Red, make your rounds and ensure that each group is training as needed. Your group is based upon strategy and skill, so leave a person with each other group to learn their strengths so you can make better decisions when the time comes." I said while trying not to sound bitter.

Red kneeled then spoke. "I am sorry my lord, I was not trying to contradict your orders but this is for the best."

"It's okay, I made you the leader of that group because I knew that you would make the good decisions that I was incapable of. It just leaves a bad taste in my mouth that we can't leave yet. I hate that those fools in that town are just sitting in their cozy in their little houses while thinking of more ways to exploit their young to serve them. If I arrive only to find that they have sent out another daughter than I will show them no mercy. They will know suffering unlike anything they could imagine." I said as I struggled to keep my anger in check.

They had to know that their daughters were dying as they never heard from them again, nor did the Duke's son's requests for a bride stop.



"Go now, I will attend to my group." I ordered as Red stood.

As I walked back towards my group of shock troops, I thought about how I could improve and train them. I needed to motivate them and figure out how to make the best use of their skills. The problem with this is that I wasn't sure they had any. They were maimed and sullen, fierce and proud. They were like me. I needed to help them while figuring out the best way to use them in combat. No one here was fodder, but my group could be considered the closest and I knew it. I needed to change that in the course of six hours.

I examined my group of gobs. There were a few that stood out to me above the rest. There was a female that had a missing eye and a scar ranging from above her eyebrow to below her cheek. I approached her.

"Why did you keep your scars? What happened to you?" I asked her.

"I was captured by a small group of humans. I fought them, as my family closed in. In the end we won, this is the mark I gained for protecting my child when they attacked." She answered while looking at me proudly.

"You are all the more beautiful for it. It is a sign, proof that you have stood your ground against terrible odds for what really matters." I told her as I raised her head to face me.

"You sir, why keep that scar across your face? Why do you wish to show your damage?" I asked a male goblin who had a scar going from one cheek to another. It was likely that originally he had his nose chopped off.

"I keep this mark to show that I defended our village from a kobold attack. They had recently broke from our clan to strike out on their own and sought to take our females with them. I faced their chief in single combat and won. Had I failed they would have sacked the rest of us. After my fight, they thought twice about their odds and fled as they left me

to die. I lived and I protected our clan that day. This is a mark of my victory." He answered as he glowed in pride.

I admired him, but his story says more to me than just that. It says that there are both kobolds and lizardmen in this area. I will have to be careful as we proceed.

"A fine victory that was! You have earned your honor. I recognize your valor and I see why you have kept your scar." I answered.

"Do you all know why I have kept you all near me?" I posed to everyone.

They turned to each other and began to talk.

One snarky looking gob stepped forward. "Because we were all that was left after you chose everyone else?" He said as the rest laughed.

He wasn't entirely wrong. I had to stifle a laugh myself.

"No! I chose you all because I know you won't back down when the fighting turns to chaos. I know you will stand your ground even as your brothers fall around you and the blood falls like rain. I chose you to put fear into the hearts of our enemies. We will be the first thing they see, and the last thing they remember." I looked into each of their eyes as I spoke making sure that I saw the fire burning in their souls.

This group is indeed mine.

"Now come! I challenge each and every one of you. Fight me or leave this clan now!" I said, while they looked at me in shock.

It might be a brutal lesson but I can think of no other way to train them in such a short time. This way they will lose their fear of death and gain some experience fighting together.

The snarky one was the first to charge. He shrieked a shrill battle cry as he dove at me. I shot out a spike and impaled him in the chest, raising him into the air as the life escaped his eyes.

I tossed his body to the side.

"Next."

Their eyes grew wide, some in shock, some in rage but none looked scared.

I was proud.

The next one to charge was the one with the cheek to cheek scar. He acted with more caution than the previous one and attempted to circle around to my back. He was fast and I couldn't turn in time to stop his stone axe from driving into my kidney. I grabbed the weapon by the blade as it caught on my spine and pulled him towards me into my waiting spike. I drove it through his eye, then as he gasped his last I unceremoniously tossed his corpse at the others.

"He did well, but I think you all can do better. Fight!" I yelled as they screamed and charged en masse.

This was what I wanted. I wanted to see the anger in their eyes and feel their rage. They needed to remember this feeling for when the real battles start.

They dove at me indiscriminately with no regard for their own bodies as I stabbed and crushed them. My body was a mess of cuts, gouges and even bite marks as the last goblin fell. None ran and none backed down as I massacred them. I looked over my current condition. If I were anything other than a flesh golem I would be dead. My neck had been sliced, my intestines were hanging free and my left arm was only on by a thread.

I used fleshcrafting to restore myself, then I went to each of them and restored them one at a time.

"Bob, I need you to go hunting, bring back whatever you can. As it's going we will need materials soon." I said as Bob took off into the forest.

The following six hours were a mess of fighting and gore as my group became ever more bloodthirsty. With each death they seemed to lose a little more humanity. The looks on their faces had changed into something else now. They looked feral and crazed. The feeling of danger pulsed from them in waves and I knew that they were no longer the same gobs that assembled and cracked jokes earlier. They

were berserkers. They would swarm and rend the flesh of our enemies by any means possible. They no longer feared death or defeat, they were single minded in their pursuit of violence. I could feel the dark god smiling on us, for tonight, I had done its bidding and created a group of fanatics.

I could feel a tinge of sadness as I looked at them but I knew it was for the greater good of the clan. I could only hope that their scars would remind them of their identity and allow them to keep some semblance of self.

"Go now my proud warriors and rest. Tomorrow you start your new lives." I said as they bowed.

At least they still seem to be in their right minds. Though I worry about their futures, I don't see any end to conflict any time soon. If what Ralpus said was true, then I will need to crack open the Duke's city to get that blonde bastard. When that time comes, I will need much more than a small force of modified goblins. They may be fierce but they aren't soldiers yet. They still lack experience.

I began walking to the middle of town towards the fire-pit. It seems like Leera's group had already lit it. I smelled the aroma of roasting meat and looked for the source. I saw Leera smiling happily as she ate some rodent on a stick. Fura was standing beside her looking appalled as she ate something leafy. The girls were happily playing with the goblin children. Wendy and one of the young goblin girls seemed to be playing a game of tag. Roscia looked like she wanted to join, but stayed where she was. Was she shy? The sisters seemed to be showing off their magic to the stunned goblin boys. I think they were the same group that was making fun of red earlier.

I found an empty spot by Leera and sat down. She pulled her meat away as if she was scared I would try to take a bite.

"How'd it go with your group?" I asked as she greedily stuffed her face. She was still ladylike enough to cover her mouth as she chewed, but it made for a funny sight.

"Terrible! They were all over the place. Even with the help of their moms we weren't able to keep everyone under control. Pesky little green brats!" Fura said in forestkin.

"Talk in english, it's rude to exclude people from your conversations." I told her in forestkin.

She eyed me nervously for a moment then spoke in English. "Kids, did not listen. I, not like kids. I'm tired, too much work."

Leera stopped mid chew and looked at Fura incredulously. "You, didn't do anything. You just disappeared into the forest and left it all to me. The children are quite playful, but I enjoyed helping everyone out. I realize that someday soon it'll be our children that are making a mess for everyone and it's important that we all take care of each other. You as well Fura, you'll have children soon too."

"Dryads, cannot become pregnant." Fura replied with a smug expression while crossing her arms.

"You can." I said as her smugness melted into concern. "You're not really a dryad anymore. Haven't you noticed your skin or the fact that you bleed and breath now?"

She looked to Leera as if for help, but Leera just turned away and resumed eating.

Leera smiled up at me and begrudgingly offered me a bite of her food which I took. It had been a while since I had cooked meat. I could feel myself start to smile, she was right, It was definitely better this way.

I heard the flapping of wings as Lina landed nearby and dropped off an armful of small woodland animals.

I had her and Bob gather game so that I could train my group. It seems that Lina had been dropping some off here as well and I could guess who asked her to.

I looked at Leera, who just blushed and shrugged.

"They know how to make fire, of course I was going to cook something when I got the chance." She said as she smiled mischievously at me.

Lina tucked her wings and took her normal spot on my lap. I hugged her close and kissed the top of her head as she began skinning her catches. She was an expert at this point and she was finished in only a few minutes.

Nex, Liz and their group were the next to arrive. They were all carrying small game as well, likely a part of their archery training.

Lina eyed Nex warily and I could feel her tensing up in my lap. This won't do, I'll have to solve this at some point. I can't have in-fighting weighing on their minds in the heat of battle. I don't want to lose either one of them.

Nex looked at Lina in my lap and frowned.

"I wanted to do that." She said with a slight pout as she walked towards us.

This isn't good, at this rate there will be another fight. I spread my legs apart, moved Lina over to my left thigh and gestured for Nex to sit on my right leg. Lina looked insulted, I forgot how jealous she could be. I guess this means that she hasn't accepted Nex as a mate or maybe she thinks of Nex as a rival.

As Nex sat down I put my arms around each of their hips and turned them to face each other. They both looked a little shocked, but neither one would make eye contact with the other. I kissed each one, then hugged them both close, both to me and to each other as they awkwardly flailed their arms, not quite knowing how to react to the sudden contact.

"Tonight I will claim you both, at the same time." I told them as they finally made eye contact. Nex's eyes flashed for a second and Lina began to blush her deep crimson.

"You're going to claim them first!?" Fura said as she draped herself on my shoulder.

"I don't really care about this whole 'claiming' thing, but if it gets the icky green guys to stop flinging goo at me then I should be first." Fura said, once again speaking in forestkin as I had warned her not to.

I reached back and pinched her, which caused her to make a loud yelping noise as she shot me an angry look.

"You called?" The bearded goblin spoke up as he eyed Fura disdainfully.

"Yes, yes she did, why don't you try to claim her?" I said, still laughing at the situation.

"Oh no honey, she is not my type... You on the other hand." He said as he looked me over.

Oh god, please don't let him throw any weird substances at me.

"You can claim me any time!" He said with a wink as he rubbed his finger across his lips.

"Er, uh... Hmm, I'm very flattered, but I'm all full up on mates at the moment. Maybe some other time." I said in the nicest way I could.

Where's Bob when you need him, although, if he were here, he would probably just be rolling around laughing his ass off. This guy might very well be right down Bob's alley though.

"Bob!" I yelled.

I felt hot breath on my neck as something warm dripped on me.

"Shit! Sha'Dwarg!" I screamed as I stood suddenly and spun around in full force to face the enemy, thereby tossing Nex into the distance and Lina onto her face.

"You rang..." Bob said doing his best Lurch impression.

Calm down... Don't murder Bob. Bob is our friend, we don't murder our friends in terrible, gruesome, unimaginable ways.

"Boss are you okay? Your eye is doing this weird twitching thing." Bob said as he smiled at me.

That son of a bitch knows full well why my eye is doing this.

Lina looked up at me with a hurt expression as she rubbed her head. I picked her up and kissed her forehead as I mended her with fleshcrafting.

"Oh no... Nex, are you okay?" I yelled into the darkness.

All I heard in reply was a groan. I ran into the direction that I had accidentally punted her in, only to find her slumped against one of the mud huts.

It's okay me, all we have to do is mend her and pretend that we didn't just freak out and launch our mate into a building. Everything will be fine, maybe we can just call it a dream or something, yeah, that always works...

I bent down and mended her as I picked her up in my arms and carried her back to the fire. I sat her back on my lap as she opened her eyes.

"What happened my love? One minute I was sitting here, then, I think, I flew?" She said as I finished mending her concussion.

"It, uh, it was all a dre-"

"Wow! I've never seen the Boss launch someone like that! GOAL!!" Bob yelled before I could finish.

I barely closed my eyes in time to prevent myself from casting Petrifying Gaze at him.

"He what!?" Nex said as she stared at me with wide eyes.

I opened my mouth, but no words came out.

"How far?" She asked Bob.

"From what I could tell, you hit that house all the way over there." He said as he pointed.

"Wow, that is impressive!" She said as she looked at me in amazement.

"You're not mad?" I said tentatively.

She smiled at me. "No, if he really had been a threat I would have been well out of harm's way. You protected me."

"What about me..." Lina said, looking like she was on the verge of tearing up.

"Uh-" I began.

"You would be the bait. That way the rest of us could be safe while the creature ate you." Nex replied flatly.

"I was the bait." Lina said as her bottom lip began to quiver.



CALMING EFFECT!

CALMING EFFECT!

"Master, please stop, don't you remember what happens when you abuse the calming effect."

CALMING EFFECT!

CALMING EFFECT!

CALMING EFFECT!

If I could only turn back time... If I could find some way. Oh god, now that song is stuck in my head. I hate that song. Have you ever noticed how much she looks like the crypt keeper just skinned a lady and put on her skin, Buffalo Bill style. Ah Buffalo Bill, there was a guy who had his shit straight, well, not exactly straight. What was that song? Goodbye horses.

I feel fan-fucking-tastic. "Weee!"

"Uh oh, I think the boss is broken. What the hell is he doing?" I vaguely heard Bob say through the beautiful glaze that coated my mind.

"My love, why do you remove your clothes? Is it time?" Nex said, sounding like a far-away echo from a reality that couldn't possibly exist.

"John! Snap out of it, why are you tucking those between your legs." Some weirdly dressed asian schoolgirl said.

I heard explosive laughter coming from the weirdest unicorn that I had ever seen.

"Oh my Boss, I know what he's doing! Gather round, it gets better!" The ugly unicorn said through mad laughter.

"Would you do me... I'd do me!" I said as I pinched myself.

"What are you doing?" A sexy bat-dwarf said.

"I'd do me so fucking hard!"

"Ah, beard guy is getting into it now too, look at him go." Said the freaky poodle-corn.

"John, please! Stop! You're scaring us... But I find it somewhat mesmerizing." A pretty horse lady said.

"Yeah, call me Mister Ed and I'll feed you a carrot."

## Chapter 14: Into The Soulscape - John

"Master! Master!"

I saw a pretty fairy lady flying above me. I couldn't believe how cute she was.

"Come here little butterfly girl." I said as she flew closer.

"Gotcha!" I caught and hugged her, she was so soft and smelled like jasmine and... Is that absinthe.

"Master, please release me, you're squeezing too hard!" The girl said as she began to struggle in my arms.

I moved her away from my chest and held her under her arms, she's so tiny. Does she know how tiny she is?

I moved my thumbs down on her adorable Jubbies .

"Oh, I know what to do here." I said as her eyes went big.

"Up Up Down Down Left Right Left Right B A."

The girl bit her lip as her face reddened.

"I'm sorry Master." She spread her wings and a pulse of green energy knocked my hands away.

"Ooh, pretty!"

"What's wrong with him?" A hot chick with long brown hair and a beautiful face said. She looked a bit too young though.

"He's abused the calming effect. It basically mimics the effects of the intoxicants he remembers using on his original world. He used it five times and now he's drunk on it."

"Hey, brown haired girl, how old are you?" I asked as I began grooming my eyebrows.

"Don't answer, I don't think this is going anywhere good." The tiny lady said.

She crossed her arms. "Nineteen."

"Ooh, legal loli. So, I have some rum in my van if you want to do shots, but there won't be any chasers, unless you run." I said as I gave her one of my best smiles.

Her mouth just dropped open as she gave me a strange expression.

"There's free wifi and candy, I swear."

She blinked at me several times before responding. "Okay then, take me to this 'van.'"

"Well, I don't really have one. I guess we could borrow someone else's. Hey, butterfly woman, let us use your van for, uh." I looked her up and down for a moment. She was wearing a sexy black dress and combat boots. "About two minutes."

The fairy facepalmed. "Master, I know you can't feel it right now, but the part of me that is you is absolutely mortified. Think about your goals, think about your people, think about what you really want."

"Pizza, maybe a trip to the awful waffle. No blue waffles though."

"Remember Threscia." The fairy pleaded.

"Remember Thads." The girl in black spoke.

"Ah..." My world came crashing in on me. It was like the worst hangover I could imagine combined with a full body ice-cream headache.

"Oh god, what have I done." I fell to my knees.

I don't know how I can make this up to everyone. What do I tell Mors. 'I'm sorry, I was just trying to give you infinite lives.' Poor Lina was so sad, and I humiliated my mates yet again. Shit, I just called Threscia a legal loli. There's no way to live that down. Maybe the dark god can just consume me now because I'm not sure I want to deal with this.

I slowly opened my eyes, though there was no real light here it still hurt for some reason.

"It's fine Master, I already know you're sorry, besides I'm here to serve you." Mors said while still blushing slightly.

The twins responded immediately.

I looked at Threscia, she just smiled at me as she spoke. "Don't worry you didn't force yourself on me, but what is

this legal loli thing? Maybe I should look through your memories later."

"Please don't." I quickly replied.

There are some parts of a man's mind that simply should not be explored.

I stood though my body ached. Strangely enough the green glow was gone. Threscia looked as if she was flesh and blood.

"Mors, why has she lost the ethereal glow?" I asked.

"Maybe a side effect of your overindulging the calming effect."

I walked over to Threscia and grabbed her hand, it felt almost real. I twirled her around and hugged her against me as she giggled.

"Not now, maybe after we get Thads." She said as she turned and kissed me.

"You definitely know how to use your wiles, don't you. He will get what's coming his way, and then some." I answered as I hugged her close, feeling her soft hair pressed against my cheek. She smelled like clothes dried in the sun and burning leaves in autumn.

"You have already given yourself to me, there is no way I would betray you." I said as she looked up to me with her big blue eyes.

I ran my fingers through her hair and as her head tilted back I kissed her deeply. Her arms gripped me tightly as she returned my kiss.

"Master, I'm sorry to interrupt, but we have an appointment with a Death Knight."

Threscia broke off the kiss as she held her hand to her lips. "That was nice." She said with a slight smile.

"Alright Mors, let's go." I grudgingly released Threscia.

The darkness shifted in blurs of green and black as a man materialized in front of me. His armor was made entirely of bone and on his head was a helm made of a human skull with ram horns. There was a putrefying aura

coming from him as he raised his milk white eyes to meet mine.

"My liege, you have arrived." He said as he bowed. "I pledge myself to your service as the last disciple of the death god Obitus. He is gone, but I feel much of him in you, especially your training methods."

Hmm, why does that name seem familiar.

"Rise my knight, I accept your pledge and take you into my service." I said as he rose.

He bowed to Threscia. "Ah, Mistress Threscia, it's good to see you again, have you used it yet?"

"Not yet, he hasn't gotten into any real battles. He's just been training and traveling so far."

"Tis a pity, I would have liked to see it in action again." He said with a wistful expression.

"Just what is it you wish to see?" I asked him.

"Plague swarm, it is the first spell Obitus granted me. It is a swarm of mana that feeds off the enemies life energy until they die, then it moves on to the next." He said proudly.

"How does it know who is an enemy?"

"It doesn't, we all serve death. Let it destroy us all... Barring that, you may just cancel it if it started affecting someone you wanted to live, but why deny them the sweet embrace of our father."

"Your father is no more. Though I can bring them back, I would rather not kill my own people. I am not a god of death. I am a god of void." I said as I pondered my words.

Now that I think about it I guess I'm worse than a god of death. Like Lang said, it's a wonder the followers of Theressa haven't been sent my way yet.

The Death Knight cocked his head slightly as he stared at me.

I responded to his confusion. "Either way, there are those that I don't want to kill. Those who have pledged themselves to me, and those that I care for."

"But your final goal is the annihilation of all life, yes?" He asked, head still cocked.

"No, it's to devour all. To return everything to nothing, but I have an eternity to do that. For now, I just want my people to be happy and our enemies to suffer." I answered as the dark god gave me a warm feeling, verifying my convictions.

I believe that after this world is mine, perhaps I can move on to another with my trusted people as this one fades to nothing. Though I know I'm fighting a losing battle as once everything is gone there will only be me and the dark god, left with an eternity spent in total darkness. The dark god cannot be killed as without void there cannot be creation. Why then, did he leave a part of himself on this world? My only guess is that eternal darkness is boring, and through me he feels what it's like to be alive.

"Isn't that an even more grand ambition! I am pleased to call you master and I am pleased to have made the correct choice. Now how may I be of service, you are welcome to absorb my knowledge or do as you please with me." He said graciously.

"I would give you a body. You taught Threscia, and I would like you to teach me and my men as well. Let's show this world a taste of the death god's power." I said with a smile.

If I simply took his spells, I would only be making myself better, but this way I can improve myself as well as everyone else, along with gaining a powerful ally. It's not just me now, I have to do what is best for everyone.

"It may be some time before you have a body however. I ran out of parts and Threscia is next on the getting a body list." I told him.

"Yes, Threscia is my first student. We are in agreement, make her something deadly. I will gladly train her once you create something for me. For now I think I have the perfect

spell for you, if you would care to learn." He said in a deep sinister voice.

The next few hours were spent training with the Death Knight. He had taught me to visualize the particles and bacteria living in the stomach of recently dead things in order to create an explosion of acid and rot. Basically it was just supercharging the digestive process thereby creating a large expansion of gas suddenly, combined with enhancing the properties of the stomach acid and the power of the bacteria to consume and infect. It was a spell that I recognized from games I had played before. Corpse Explosion. Though in this world it had a more dramatic effect if the corpse was armored as it would generate shrapnel. The gas it released was methane which I knew to be extremely flammable.

When I considered the applications I realized that it could be used as a chain reaction. Kill one guy, blow him up, then blow up the ones he blew up until there were none left. He wasn't wrong, this spell could decimate a battlefield. There was only one problem with it, I use bodies for fleshcrafting and regeneration. I would have to use this spell only in the worst situations.

"Be warned, some enemies have magical barriers and death wards that will protect them completely. At least they did in my time." He said bitterly.

I'm guessing that one of these things was likely the cause of his death. Though maybe he died to the book of souls, I can't be certain, but I don't want to press for more. All that matters now is that he is pledged to me and I will see him thrive in the wake of the death I create as I take this world.

"Very well my knight, what shall I call you?"

"My name is unimportant, just call me Thrall." He said as he placed his hand on his chest and bowed.

I know that's not his real name, but I'm just glad that there is finally someone without a name ending in an S. when I think about it, how does he even know that word,

and why is he speaking in English? I glanced at Threscia as who averted her eyes immediately. I guess it would have been hard to learn from someone whom you can't communicate with.

I wonder why he doesn't want me to know his name. I looked him over once more. His armor was an assortment of bones and skull fragments, I doubt they came from volunteers, no I'm sure that if I knew his name I may someday find out about his past deeds. I'm guessing he wasn't exactly one of the good guys, but by now he knows I'm not exactly good myself. What could he have done that he's trying to hide?

"Thrall, the next time we meet, it will be on the other side, for now, I must go."

Mors once again began to glow that sickly green color as everything swirled back into darkness, leaving the three of us alone together in awkward silence.

I cleared my nonexistent throat. "Well then, I guess I should get back and face the music."

"You mean goodbye horses?" Threscia snarked.

"Please, don't remind me. I may never recover." I said while rubbing my temples.

I wonder just how much longer this headache will last.

"You recover, what about everyone else." She said with a sadistic grin.

"It's okay Master, you have some slight memory loss between now and then. Before you passed out, most of the goblins joined in on the dance. After that you officially added it to their claiming rituals before you claimed your mates."

That's what I can't remember? I feel cheated.

I guess it's time to get back.

"I'll see you both later, I have a town to get to."

I opened my eyes slowly while fighting the urge to vomit.



## Chapter 15: Last Night - Leera

I felt John starting to move as I wearily opened my eyes. Last night was crazy, at first we all thought that there was something wrong with him when he started doing that weird dance. I'm not familiar with goblin mating customs, but I somehow doubt that was normal.

My head was laying on Liz. Her stomach was soft and fluffy.

I ran my hand along her fur. She was like a demon last night, it's rare to see John not being the dominant one, but she held him down and bound him with ice. She rode him with enough force to shake the ground as she smiled that creepy smile she has. It's so strange, she seems so composed and intelligent, but when it comes to John she turns into a demon of lust.

"Ahh! What the hell!" John yelled.

I turned my head to see Bob spooning John. When did he get there?

"So, what do you want to name it?" Bob said with a feminine flair.

John raised an eyebrow, "name what?"

"Our baby silly, you were an animal last night. No one's ever touched me that way before."

"Oh my sweet god. No!"

I yawned, Bob was not involved in our mating last night. I would say something, but this is too funny. Could it be that John doesn't remember?

"Yes my dear, you were an animal! Bob is definitely pregnant now." I said while I hid my smile with my hand.

I don't normally tease him but I just couldn't resist, maybe I'm feeling a little left over jealousy from last night.

"...Consume me, please consume me, consume. ...consume ...consume." John began chanting over and over.

Whoops, I think we went too far.

"I was thinking if it's a boy we'll name him John Jr. after his daddy and if it's a girl we'll name her Bobbette after her mommy." Bob said while fluttering his eyelashes.

John began muttering something, "Kill Bob... Then myself, it's all a dream John, it's okay to kill things in a dream... Just need to wake up."

Bob took John's head and placed it on his stomach. "See, if you listen you can hear it's little heartbeat."

John swallowed hard and stopped speaking as he focused to hear.

Bob farted then burst out in laughter, "Ahh, got ya!"

God it stinks like death, and not in the good way.

"Dammit Bob, we all have enhanced senses here." I chastised him.

With our stomachs there is no need to fart. Bob's an ass.

John puked on Fura who just murmured something and rolled over.

I held my nose. "Oh why, it smells so bad."

I feel bad for John but I need to get away from here or I may follow his example. I sifted through the sleeping bodies and found my dress. I felt myself smiling, he really is sweet. I got dressed and picked out some leather pants and boots from the salvage pile. I like tempting John, but there's more than just the two of us here and it wouldn't be right to tempt anyone else. Though after our display last night I don't think there are any goblin males who believe they could match up.

After she got drunk, Nex kept trying to sneak in widows and single females, and given the state John was in I think he would have done it. I had to tell her that it would cause unrest amongst the males if they no longer had any mates of their own. She seemed to calm down a bit, then she started crying about forgetting her role. I hugged her and one thing led to another as John saw this as an invitation.

He was incredible last night. He took Liz first. She looked so timid and vulnerable as she bared herself to everyone. He began by kissing her and working his way down her body as she shuddered. I knew that feeling well, it brought back memories. As I watched I began fondling Fura as she gasped and moaned I pushed her to her knees and placed her head between my legs. She had become quite good at this after that first time.

She worked on me as John worked on Liz it almost felt like it was me. He stood and they kissed each other for some time as he ran his hands down her body and began teasing her small tender nipples with his rough fingers.

Her face was flushed and she was breathing hard as he slowly began to enter her. I pushed Fura's head against me, she began to rub herself and I felt her moan into me.

On the other side I could see Lina and Nex watching with longing as John began thrusting into Liz. He lovingly caressed her face as they gazed into each other's eyes. It made me feel lonely, in that moment it was like the rest of us didn't exist to them.

Though he held her tenderly he began thrusting with stronger and stronger force. She dug her back hooves into the ground and began to thrust back against him. I could hear their wet skin meeting as they slammed into each other. Liz lost her composure and I could tell she was getting close. I was getting close as well as Fura's tongue attacked my clit.

I heard Liz's moans become more urgent as John hugged her close against him. She began to shake while he continued to drive himself into her. Her legs began to buckle and they kissed each other as she came in his arms.

John began to tense and I could see him thrust deeply inside her as he began to fill her. Their juices poured down her legs making the ground wet as I came into Fura's mouth. I grabbed her head again and ground her face

against me. I could tell from the muffled moans that she had gotten herself off as well.

I looked down at the selfish dryad. Her face was wet and flushed, her eyes stared at me longingly as I bent to kiss her. In a way she was as much my mate as John's.

I heard a cracking noise and saw John's arms and legs anchoring him at an angle into a slanted block of ice. Liz had both hands on her face as she smiled a smile that sent shivers down my spine but John didn't fight it or look frightened. She turned herself around and lowered her ass onto his still throbbing members as she twisted to look at him. She took him in slowly before she began to mercilessly slam herself down on him. The ice under him began to show cracks as she released a string of feverish moans. In this moment she looked possessed and fierce like some sort of otherworldly beast. When I first saw her I thought she was a little plain but now I saw, she was truly beautiful.

I felt myself walking towards her. Her front half was still that of a fragile looking girl and I embraced her. She looked at me in confusion for a moment but she was too lost in her lust to protest.

I turned her head to face me and began to kiss her. Her eyes calmed down and locked onto mine her skin was slightly tanned and I could see tiny freckles on her face and shoulders. I began kissing each one as something cracked behind her.

John had picked this time to break free and was holding her hips in place as he drove himself into her recklessly. She began to moan as I traced my finger slowly down her chest towards the wet place between her slender thighs. I inserted my fingers and placed my hand against my pubic mound as I began to thrust my hips.

I looked over her shoulder and met John's gaze as we violated Liz. I could feel myself getting more and more aroused with each thrust as I could feel the force of him through her.

Something in Liz broke and she began to make girlish noises as she was no doubt getting more stimulation than she could handle. Her eyes began to tear up as she pulled me close. I rubbed my chest against hers using her nipples to stimulate mine as I felt her the slick walls of her sex twitching around my fingers. I pulled her face down and nibbled on her cute fluffy ears.

Her whole body began to shake as I felt John grinding himself against her and releasing his seed. She came as her legs buckled and she fell to her knees panting. I licked my fingers tasting the mixture of her and John's union as John followed her down and continued to pump into her.

I walked over and grabbed Fura roughly by her red hair. It might seem mean, but the look on her face says she loves it. As a dryad she had spent her life abusing others but had never been on the receiving end and she had a big weak spot for it.

As John stood I roughly forced her to her knees in front of him and got on my knees beside her. I took his slick length into my mouth as his last spurts coated the back of my throat. I forced Fura's head roughly down on him ignoring her gagging and choking. John moaned as he watched us swallow him.

I began to be aware of the large crowd that had gathered around us as they watched me suck him. I could feel my cheeks flush, my body was on fire. Everything was exposed and I could feel their eyes on me, imagining what they would do to me or what it would feel like if they were in John's place as our mouths slid up and down his shafts. I knew it wouldn't take much to make me come this time. Even though I hadn't been touching myself I knew I was on the edge of losing control.

I felt his hand curling around my head as he grabbed my hair. He forced me down on him roughly a few times before ripping me away with a wet smacking sound.

He pulled us both up by our hair as he kissed us both passionately. He threw Fura down on the ground and ordered her to be a table. She looked confused until he said something in that weird language that the two of them spoke.

She got on all fours and braced herself. He forced me onto her back with my ass in the air. I felt his hand gathering up my hair as his member pressed against my swollen entrance. He thrust into my depths as he pulled my hair back and Fura gasped under me, letting me know he entered her as well.

I opened my eyes to see everyone staring as his cock kissed my cervix. Others were mating all around us, their moans were everywhere and the smell of sex filled the air. I felt myself clench as I fought the urge to come. A few feet from us Lina and Nex were cleaning Liz with their mouths as she squirmed and moaned. Lina and Nex began to kiss each other, sharing his intoxicating taste between them. I reached my hands down and cupped Fura's swinging breasts as he rammed into us. I began to twist and pinch her as she released a few stifled moans.

As John released my hair to grab my hips I put my mouth against her ear. "Look, They're all watching as he forces himself inside you. They're seeing your lewd face as he uses your dirty hole for his own pleasure." When I finished speaking she began to moan in earnest as she fell onto her elbows giving him a better angle to fuck us. John took note of this and began to thrust harder.

I closed my eyes tightly as I fought my own moans.

"Look, the black haired one is about to come." I heard a male voice.

No, I won't lose to Fura. I bent back down and whispered to her again. "I know you're close. If you're going to come, tell him!"

"I... Coming."

"Louder!" I said as I softly bit her neck.

"I Coming!!" She said as she lost control and began to buck her hips against him, thereby forcing him deeper into me as well.

I bit her neck harder as I fought to outlast her, but it was in vain as my body betrayed me and I began to shake. She quivered under me but I knew I was done. I finally released my moans as I gave myself over to the pleasure. I felt his hands pulling me into him as he throbbed inside me filling me with his warmth.

I was his, time after time he proved it. Compared to him I was weak, I loved him and I loved what he made me feel. I had never been in a relationship before but I can't imagine another man making me feel so much pleasure in defeat. I could feel my muscles gripping him as they fought the flood of liquid he filled me with. They sucked it greedily while they tried to accommodate his volume. I was helpless and I loved it.

Fura came under me, her screams drown out mine as her arms gave out. John moaned loudly while his seed began to leak from us in waves. With each pulse of his orgasm mine intensified, he was driving me crazy as he came in me.

Finally I felt his orgasm stop as he slowly began to pull out of me. As his cock passed my lips my orgasm finished and immediately wanted him inside me again. I was literally made for him and my body knew it.

He picked me up in his arms and kissed me deeply. It made me happy to know he felt the same. We were united, connected, when I used to dream of a mate I never imagined that I would be this happy.

My body was still weak from my orgasm as he carried me over to the spent Liz and laid my head on her furry underside. She reached a hand down and moved the hair out of my eyes as we watched John bring Fura over and lay her down by us. She reached out to him as he rose and he knelt back down and kissed her, then said something in her

language that made her smile before moving on to Lina and Nex.

We all watched as he laid down and waived them over. Lina was first, he forced her down onto his top member as she turned beet red. Her mouth opened as she began to moan. He then forced Nex down on his lower member making the two of them face each other. He pulled Nex over Lina forcing them against each other as he began to move them up and down. Lina submitted and wrapped her wings around Nex and gripped Nex's thighs with her talons as they rode him.

He rolled them over and began to savagely thrust into them. They both seemed to come easy as I could tell they were already on the verge of their first orgasm. Lina took one of Nex's nipples into her mouth and began to suck. John noticed this and slapped her ass, causing her to bite down. I flinched at the thought, but Nex went over the edge and began to spasm with Lina not far behind her. He pressed his fingers into Lina's ass as she arched her back and they all came together. John leaned forward trapping them under him as he continued to pump them.

I had seen this many times now, he's beyond the point of return. If I don't stop him here he may not stop at all. I struggled to rise, but Liz held me in place. I looked at her face again, only to see that twisted smile of hers. Of course, she's a closet sadist. Lina's screams of pleasure and pain could be heard by all as he switched holes. He bent forward and licked the blood from Nex's nipple before kissing her passionately. As he pulled back she bit his lip and I could see blood trickling from his mouth but instead of stopping he just began thrusting harder. I heard a scream from Nex and I knew he had hit her depths. Her eyes were like a torch in the dark as she pulled him in and began to bite and kiss him.

The goblin women watching looked on in a mix of concern and arousal at their displays of complete passion as



Lina finished her second orgasm. John leaned on his back and pulled them on top of him once again being careful not to slip out of either of them. He spread Lina's legs and Pushed Nex's legs together as he held his legs in the air. He ordered Nex to begin moving as Lina wrapped her legs around her. Nex was in the superior position and it looked like she was fucking Lina just as much as she was John. He reached up and held Lina's arms behind her as Nex leaned forward and began kissing her. Soon they were all spent in their final orgasm as Lina lay flat on John's stomach and Nex layed on top of them both. He slipped out of them and his seed began coming out of them in gout.

He rested for a moment before carrying them both over and laying them beside us. Nex was still wrapped in Lina's wings as they both just lay there smiling hapily. He leaned in and kissed them both lovingly before he grabbed Liz's hand and pulled her back to the center again. Round two!? I felt myself getting wet again, of course he wouldn't be done. I knew then that he was going to take us all again and again. Something was different about him tonight, but other than the dance I couldn't put my finger on it.

It wasn't long after that that we started dipping into the ale and I got to know Nex better. Later that night we all collapsed together. Fura was already passed out and John laid his head on her stomach. I curled up under his left arm, Nex buried herself in his right armpit and Lina took her normal spot on top of him. Liz edged in beside me and threw her arm over me as I ran my fingers along her hips alternating between her warm fur and her soft skin.

Nex rested her arm over John and Lina like a protective mother. I think I understand her view of her role a little more now. She and I are in a similar place when it comes to John and our family. John reached down and began running his fingers through Lina's hair as he always did while he fell asleep and the rest of us weren't that far behind him.

## Chapter 16: Departing The Goblin Village - Leera

I wonder where Lina and Nex went, I don't remember seeing either one of them when I woke up this morning.

After the events of last night the whole village overslept. I looked at the sky, judging from the sun, it's about mid-day.

"You son of a bitch!"

"Caakaw!!"

I saw the ugliest bird I had ever seen as it flew over my head and crashed into one of the gob-hovels.

Are we already under attack!? I fought my fear as I ran to investigate it. I don't want to remain labeled as the weakest of us and I won't let something attack my flock.

I activated Life Sense and I could see it stirring. It sifted through the rubble and began... Licking itself.

Oh, it's Bob.

I sighed, does he really have to stretch his leg out like that, and why is he making eye contact?

I quickly turned around and began to find my group. For me it wasn't hard, most of them didn't partake in last night's ceremonies and drinking so they were all preparing food and looking after their young ones. I had told them yesterday to gather whatever weapons and armor that they could find and they all looked ready to fight.

Our group shouldn't be underestimated, we also have our daughters some of them are amongst the strongest of us. Then, there's me. I tried not to feel sad as I compared myself. I poked out one of my spikes and looked at it. Among all of us that have these, I may very well be the only one who hasn't used mine yet. At least not for fighting, I thought as my mind went back to the day John gave me the furs. I could feel myself begin to blush.

John's group were sitting in the clearing. There's something about them that I find unsettling, their eyes look dead as if they could kill at a moment's notice. They're dangerous, is that why John picked them?

I heard a yawn and turned around to see Ralphus and Languoria.

Ralphus began speaking some gibberish towards me. It was the same language that I heard people speak from time to time, but I didn't understand it.

"He says, John killed them." Languoria said, her words tinged with a slight sadness. "Over and over. That's why they look that way."

Ralphus began speaking in his harsh tongue again before shrugging.

"He says that his ancestors once did something similar for their chosen warriors."

I was grateful to them for last night. After John started to do his dance they quickly took our daughters away from everything. Of course after I began drinking, the night becomes a little more blurred but I think they joined in the festivities later.

"Did you both have fun?" I asked, not sure who to look at.

She spoke to him, then he laughed as he shot me a bird and said "Bitch!" with a smile on his face. They must have ended up hanging out with Bob.

He began to speak again as she translated. "He says your friend Bob is funny, but it got strange when his girlfriend arrived and even stranger when his boyfriend joined them."

Yep, I knew it.

"Could you tell him, that bitch means a mean lady or a weak man and is considered an insult. Also the hand gesture is either an invitation for intercourse or a provocation."

"I'm sorry, I had no idea, I don't think John gave me your full language."

She turned red and he turned pale as she informed him.

He hung his head and began to speak again while making frantic hand gestures.

"He says that explains why everybody was yelling at us but he thought it was okay because they returned the gesture."

"How long has he been doing that?"

"Ever since this morning." She hung her head as well.

I saw a shadow pass overhead and looked up see Lina flying to join John's group. I felt a rush of wind and Bob was there as well.

Ralphus said something to Languoria. "We need to be going now, our group is almost all here." They bowed and hurried to join Bob and Lina.

My group was still preparing the food for the trip and wrangling their young ones.

I felt a slight rumbling and saw Blue's Phalanx marching out in a semi-orderly fashion to join the rest, followed by Red's group. All that's left are Nex's, Athen's and my groups.

I guess I should look after my people.

I walked back over and began helping them pack. As I was putting hard bread and dried meat in an improvised bag someone began shaking me violently from behind.

"Water! Water! Hwargh!" I turned to see Fura dry heaving. "Clean me! Must cleaning now! Hurmph!"

As I looked at her she began running from one bag to another frantically searching for something to wash off with until one of the goblin mothers grabbed her and sat her down. She retrieved a bucket of water and began wiping Fura down as she shushed her like a child.

I felt a warm hand on my shoulder followed by lips on my neck and turned to see John smiling down at me. He scooped me up in his arms and began to kiss me.

He looked into my eyes, "I missed you, you are my partner, my common sense and my first love." I could feel my face start to heat up as he stared at me. "Ride with me today, I

need someone to tell me about last night. I didn't really do anything with Bob did I?"

I put my hand on my chin and feigned deep thought. "Hmm, I'm not sure, maybe another kiss would jog my memory."

He moved the hair out of my face and we kissed each other until we heard cheers coming from a few of the gob-moms. He broke off the kiss and blushed. It's rare to see him embarrassed, it's cute.

Fura yelled out. "John, who made puke on me?"

He winced and looked at her for a moment.

"Well, I gotta go, Leera come with me." He said as he grabbed my hand and began pulling me away at a light sprint.

When John's group saw him they all rose to their feet. As we got closer Ralphus said something to John and hung his head again. Bob laughed and John joined in.

I can guess what they're laughing at, but I still feel left out by not knowing what they're saying.

"John, why don't you teach him English?" I asked while he came out of his laughing fit.

"Because to do that I would have to kill him, and if I did that, she would kill me." He said as he gestured to Languoria who was glaring daggers at him.

A slight shiver ran up my spine. She always acted sweet enough, but right now I have no doubt she would rip someone to pieces if something happened to Ralphus.

"Sorry, I didn't mean anything by it." I said to her. Her death-gaze gradually softened and she nodded before pulling Ralphus down and covering him in kisses.

Great, another crazy.

"Bob, let us mount you, it seems like everyone is here. We should get going." John said.

"Ooh, all of you at once... I'm not sure I can take it."

"Dammit Bob, do you really have to do this in front of everyone."

"You mean like we did last night."

"That was a joke right? ...Right!?" John said, looking from one person to another. No one said a thing.

"I know you're thinking about it Boss, look you're already getting hard."

"That's because those clouds over there mildly remind me of... Nevermind, you know my condition."

Bob looked up... Great, now he's hard too.

I was trying not to show my frustration, "I'm tired of this, both of you just think of dead things or something so we can go."

"Sorry doll, that ain't helping. Is that helping you Boss?"

John cleared his throat. "...Nope, but I have a condition."

"Ha, I bet Ralph is pitching a tent now too."

They both looked towards Ralphus and began to laugh. I followed their gaze. Why the hell is he hard too?

"Probably unrelated, but it is funny, he's definitely not sitting behind me." John said as they laughed at the puzzled Ralphus.

Languoria shot them both an angry look and Bob laid down.

"Damn girl, if looks could kill." Bob said as he looked over at her.

"They can." She casually replied.

For the first time I can remember, Bob had nothing to say.

Yep, another unchecked crazy that can kill me. What the hell John.

I felt John's strong hands grab me around my waist as he picked me up and sat me on Bob's shoulders. He leaped up and pulled Languoria on behind him. She reached back and they both Helped Ralphus get on, it must not be easy to jump in robes. How is he not burning up in all those layers of black, do the symbols help?

John called out to Lina who swooped down into his arms. He smoothed her hair and gave her a kiss as her familiar

blush returned.

"Lina, I'm sure everyone already knows but tell them the order we'll be traveling in. It's my group, The Phalanx, The Elites, The Ranged, then Leera's group. Athen's group should spread out and cover the flanks on either side to watch for anything suspicious. Make sure the Phalanx brings the torches."

Lina flapped her wings and flew off as John watched her longingly. From the feeling in my lower back I can guess what he's thinking about.

We sat off at a slight jog so as not to get too far in front of everyone.

"Will they be okay jogging all this way?" I asked John.

"It shouldn't be a problem. Everyone is enhanced and we'll take plenty of breaks. Bob likes to hunt while he travels anyway."

"Boss, we may have to stop soon, my back is feeling, stiff."

John laughed, "ha, backstab!"

Sometimes John worries me, especially when he's with Bob. It's like their crazy feeds off each other.

"That's what you said last night!" Bob replied.

I felt John's arms go stiff.

He really did say that last night, but it was to me.

"...Leera, please for the love of god tell me he's kidding!"

"Hmm, I don't know, we were all a little drunk," I teased.

He gripped me tighter. "Dammit. Well, tell me about what you do remember. We have a long trip ahead of us."

Over the next few hours I recounted what happened last night, in as much detail as I could. When I got to the good parts I heard Langoria cough uncomfortably behind us. Ralphus still seemed to be oblivious.

Bob started filling in his part of last night. Huh, I wondered where the beard-guy went after the mating dance.

"Like I always say, all I need is a vagina and a pulse, and both of those're optional." Bob said, replying to a question that no one asked.

I guess Bob has started his own 'harem' which was good. At least now maybe he would stop leering at us. Though I doubted it.

We continued traveling for another hour or so before John called a stop to let everyone rest and catch up.

"Bob, let's make a detour to the bandit's camp first. There we can rest up and take the last of their supplies."

"Sure thing Boss, but I thought you wanted to get to that town ASAP. I know I do, I owe 'em for what they did to the girls!"

"I do... But with this many people we won't make good time regardless, and you told me there really wasn't much to hunt the closer we got to the town. I think it would be better to get the supplies and rest until nightfall. That way we could be sure they were all there and tucked in for the night."

I decided to take a walk over to my group to check on them. I had been riding and it felt good to stretch my legs.

I heard the flapping of wings as Lina landed behind me and ran up to John. I could hear their happy chatter as I walked on.

Of all of us I wonder who is John's favorite. Most of us seem to have our own reasons to be with him, but Lina is just happy being around him.

As for Nex, after she kept trying to slip other gob girls into the mix last night her motivations were clear. She wants to strengthen her clan with a bunch of John hybrids.

Liz, seems to be truly devoted, but I think it goes beyond that, she's obsessed. I can't imagine what would happen if he ever rejected her, would she try to kill him? It's like there's a line between love and hate and pain and pleasure in her mind that's been blurred by the suffering she's endured. But I know John, and he would never reject any of



us, even if we fell into the throws of madness, he would follow us down.

Fura... I sighed. She seems to have some serious problems of her own. Her personality is all over the place. I don't think John loves her, but I think he feels obligated to bring her along. Now that she can speak a little better I should ask her what happened when she met him. She's also the super dependent type. She irresponsible, impulsive, and generally goes out of her way to avoid socializing with others. She pretty much only talks to me or John. Oddly enough though I think of her as my mate as much as John's but I don't like having to take care of her as if she was a child. Still it's strange that John doesn't take to her more. She's got a body that most men would drool over and of all of us, she was the only one that was 'proposed to' by the goblin males.

"Leera!" Fura yelled in a cheerful voice as she came running up to me.

She wrapped me in a hug and my head was once again smashed between those boulders she calls breasts.

She began speaking to me at a high speed in that weird tongue she uses while pointing at a goblin child. "Leera, beat him up, he make fun of me. Says my plants not clothes and I weird."

The goblin child noticed her pointing at him, stuck out his tongue and began to moon us.

"For most people, plants aren't clothes, and you are weird. Besides Fura, he's a child, you'll understand one day."

A pebble hit Fura in the back of the head and she ran off after the child.

In my travels I had seen parents and their children many times. It's a strange thing from my perspective but I remember feeling sad. When you have a child, it means that you are never going to be alone again. You will always have family. That was what I longed for, and that's what John gives me. What he gives us all.

The lonely me died, and looking back on it... I'm pretty sure it was Bob that killed me. I'm not exactly me either, that goblin girl that became a part of me has changed my personality as well. I can tell I'm more optimistic, less depressed, and a little more honest with myself.

As I watched the child and Fura chase each other I felt my stomach. It's a little early to be certain, but I'm hoping I'm pregnant. I would tell John, but it's just my intuition at the moment and I don't want to give him false hope or jinx it in some way.

Yesterday I heard one of the goblin crones speaking behind my back. She said that all we seem to do is dote on and talk about John. When I confronted her she said she just didn't understand my motivations.

Do I need some sort of grand motivation to stay with the man that I love? Do I really need some epic tale and the promise of a reward just to follow him and be his support. No! Anyone who thinks like that is weak, they could never really love someone. He has to be strong, but we have to be stronger, because we are what keeps him together.

I can tell, especially after last night, that without us, his life would be a bloody one. Imagine if he had seen the bandit's handiwork and didn't have anyone to come home to. He may well have self destructed and took out his anger on the world itself. He may have become a mindless beast. I feel it in his anger, there's always something else there, right below the surface.

I heard trotting and Liz and Nex came into view. Nex hopped off and grabbed a couple of pieces of bread from the supply bags. Liz walked over to me, but averted her gaze from my eyes.

She folded her hands in front of her nervously. "Hel... Hello Leera."

"Hello yourself. How's the march treating you?"

"I.. I'm not really into girls you know." She risked a glance at my eyes. "It's just, well, thank you for last night and

please don't judge me when I'm like that."

"It's okay, I understand. I'm not normally like that myself, please don't worry about it. We're all in the same place and no one's going to judge you here."

"Horse-lady! Horse-lady!" The goblin child began chanting.

Liz blushed as a dagger hit the goblin child's shirt pinning him to that weird box that John had us bring.

Nex walked over and retrieved the dagger from beside the petrified youth. "That Horse-lady as you're calling her could kill you in an instant. She's also your Chief's mate, like I am, so treat her with respect!"

"I'm sorry misses Horse-lady." The youth said with trembling lips.

Liz walked over and patted his head. "It's Liz, and I'm more like a deer-lady." she quipped.

The youth's eyes began to sparkle as he looked up to her. "Wow, Misses Liz, you're pretty!"

She blushed a bit and waved it off. So, she's the type that can't take compliments.

Fura crept up on the youth. "Gotcha!" She said before tickling him. The child squealed and squirmed away. Even he was stronger than Fura, John really needs to do something about that.

He began running in circles around her chanting. "Mean 'ol plant lady, mean 'ol plant lady."

This time Nex didn't stop him. Poor Fura, or so I would say if she didn't always bring this on herself. Nex was probably thinking the same thing.

Lina came flying over to us. "John says it's time to march some more!" Before any of us could say anything else she was already flying on to Athen.

Nex hopped back on Liz's back and Liz reached her hand back to me. "Would you like a ride?"

I took her hand and climbed on behind Nex. Compared to Bob, there really wasn't much room here, will she really be

okay carrying the two of us on those slender little legs of her's?

"Leera, grab onto my waist." Nex said in her strange accent, why does she roll the Rs. Did John give us all the same version of English? Maybe it's like Languoria was saying earlier when she didn't understand the gesture and the word Ralphus was using. Come to think of it, when I remember the goblin language they roll most of their Rs and Ls.

Before I had time to think any more about it, we were off at an amazing speed. My heart-rate shot up and my hair was ripped back as the world blurred by me. I could feel myself smiling. This was thrilling! Is this what she experiences all the time?

As soon as I started enjoying it we had reached John.

I was still laughing while I dismounted her.

I went around to face Liz and grabbed her hands. "We need to do that again some time, I had fun!"

She blushed and nodded, then she was gone.

I turned to see Bob making out with his mate. Oh, that's just gross. It looked like he was trying to eat her head, the size difference was just too great. But she seemed to enjoy it I guess.

As they parted she punched him full-force in the face. "Yeah, that's how daddy likes it!" He said with a grin.

I hope to never see this again.

John walked over to me. "Are they done yet?"

"Yeah, she walked off so unless he... Oh god he's licking himself again."

John turned around, "dammit Bob, we don't have time for that! And why are you looking at me while you do it, it's gross."

Bob sat upright and shrugged. "Okay Boss, I'll stop, but your Bobcycle is going to have a couple of kickstands for a while."

John buried his face in his hands. "Oh, I'll kick 'em alright!"

Bob grinned, "is that a promise? Or are you just teasing me?"

John kicked him.

"Alright, alright, I hear ya." Bob laid down and we all got on.

This time we rode on until twilight.

John called a stop. "Bob, we need to find a clearing before it gets dark. I don't want to risk our people's lives."

"Lina!" Lina landed in John's lap. "You and Athen's group scout around for a large clearing so we can bed down for the night." Lina did a little salute and took off into the air.

Some time passed and it began to get dark.

Lina came flying back and landed in John's arms. I think she likes doing that.

"I found one, but it's stinky."

"Stinky is better than deadly. Alert everyone that we're moving out, then guide the way."

After a few minutes of traveling, Bob froze, and John gripped me tighter.

"Boss, this smell."

"Those fucking bastards!"

Bob took off in a mad sprint, making Liz's little run earlier seem like a slow walk and soon we were in a clearing with a large pit dug on one side. It reeks!

John jumped off Bob and dove into the pit.

Why would he do that!?

After a few moments I heard a gut wrenching yell come from him as what I can only call Miasma came bubbling up around the pit.

"More! There's more of them!"

The ground began to shake and I ran to the pit to check on John. That black liquid was pouring from his eyes as he cradled a skull with bits of flesh still clinging on to it.

His eyes looked up to me and I could feel his sadness. "They're too far gone Leera. I can't bring them back."

"One percent, two percent. I can't save them." He began slamming his fist into the slick earthen wall, shaking the ground around us.

Bob stuck his head over the hole. "Boss, why don't you come outta there. There's nothing you can do."

"No! There may be more here. Maybe if I dig..." John began digging frantically through the sludge. Each time he found a skull his eyes would light with green flame, then he would set it softly to the side and increase his pace.

Eventually the other group captains came over. Liz held her hands over her mouth as tears began to flow. Nex hopped off, her face contorted in rage.

John stopped for a moment and held up what looked like a small dress. It was caked in muck and ripped to shreds, but I could still tell from the shape.

He screamed again as he clenched it in his shaking hands. Gouts of darkness came off him in waves now. His hands were bloody and torn and his whole body was covered in muck but he just stood there clutching that fabric.

"John..." I called to him.

His face shot up, his eyes cried murder. It was like he couldn't see me or he wasn't himself. My body began to shake. "John, please, it's me!"

He began tearing at the ground, dislodging large chunks of earth and stone. I heard a loud snap as one of his arms bent under the force of his efforts and hung at a strange angle.

A pair of slender arms burst through the front of his armor and wrapped him in an embrace.

His gaze softened and his expression returned to one of sadness.

Rosie looked down at him. "Father..."

The arms receded back into his chest.

He looked at the skulls laying beside him, "I'm sorry... I'm so sorry."

Bob dove down into the pit, and raised John back up, putting him onto solid ground. He then put the skulls and the dress beside him. John looked crestfallen.

Rosie hugged him, followed by the rest of the girls, even Blondie. They were all a blubbering mess. John just sat there bleeding with a vacant stare as Bob climbed out behind him.

I had been wracking my brain, desperately trying to think of some way to help him. Of course. "Why don't you combine them, like you did with me and the goblin girl? It might not save them individually, but a part of them could still live on."

His eyes lit up for a moment, then he hung his head again. "Together, they would only add up to twelve percent, twelve percent isn't a person. It would be a vegetable, unless I gave it a large chunk of myself, but then it would just become me."

He closed his black stained eyes. After a while a slight sad smile spread across his face. "It's okay, Threscia will take them into herself. Through her they may live and through her they will be avenged."

Rosie's eyes lit up. "My sister did?"

His eyes cleared up as he looked at her. "Yes."

"Boss, not to break the mood, but the smell is killin' me here."

John took a deep breath and stood. "Alright, Lina, Liz, please clean us all off, I don't care about Bob but I can't have my daughters be the stinky kids."

Lina and Liz dried their tears and began using their magics together.

Liz would create a water stream as Lina blew hot air and used her smoke elemental to do the scrubbing.

Once John was dry he gathered up the skulls and the dress and cleaned them as well before placing them into

that large black box that he brought. "I just don't want to leave them here."



## Chapter 17: Portent - Nex

After what happened, John wanted to be left alone for a while.

When I smelled that atrocious smell I knew what I was walking into. My rage burned, and my heart was still beating out of my chest. Any one of those skulls could have been me, or my family.

I visited the torches to yell in their twisted faces. When I got there Liz and our daughters were already there. We all just watched them burn in silence, but unlike last time, now no one was smiling. Even though they're suffering, when you find something like this, it's almost like they're still out there doing it. Though maybe this time it was worse since none could be brought back.

On my way back to rest, I saw my father. He looked both sad and angry. I know that as bad as it was for me, it was worse for him. He hugged me and said he was here if I needed him. After what had happened at the pit, John was hard to approach. I remember when he first talked to us, before we had bodies. He was crying, crying for us, for goblins. It was shocking and touching at the same time, but at that pit today, he felt too far. For a moment, I couldn't feel my proud mate anymore. It was something else, something that had no love in it's soul.

I remember the whispers in the darkness. They were unsettling at times, and soothing at others. Today I felt them again as I watched him tear himself apart. Leera said that she saw something black coming from the pit after he dove in, I saw nothing, but I felt it.

Tonight I will sleep with my family. We've all relived something terrible and my siblings need me.

I crossed paths with John, he said that he will sleep with our daughters tonight. It seems like we were thinking the same things. We must heal the young if they are to grow strong. Our youths are the backbones of our clan. If they are not strong, then our clan will fall one day.

I lied down and cradled my brother and sister in my arms as they cried themselves to sleep. Father came back from some sort of secret training and lie beside us.

At some point tomorrow we should reach that camp. It will be another night that my brother and sister cry themselves to sleep. It was the place of our death but for me it was also the place where life started again. I looked at their peaceful sleeping faces. I wonder if they feel the same.

Our clan has never been this powerful, in fact we were the weakest anyone could remember after the Kobolds left us. Gaining the Kobolds was a fluke in the first place. Our males happened upon a dying female Lizardman and brought her back. After much debate on whether we should eat her or breed her, it was decided that breeding her would be best. She didn't live long, but it was long enough to lay an egg. From that our clan changed.

I feel like I should warn John about them, but it's been years now, and no one has seen any of them, not even a corpse. My father used to tell me stories of him escaping Orcs and eating Gnomes, but in all my life I hadn't seen either of those things. I don't know why, but sad things make me want to tell myself horror stories. Maybe it's a reminder to myself that things could always be worse.

I wonder what happened to all of them, races that walked the same forests as us, then suddenly disappeared. John described something he called a windigo. He said that it didn't attack, it just put you to sleep and ate you. Could that thing have done all of this? If so, then why were we spared?

There's also the story of the wraith in the swamps or the bugs that can kill you with one sting, but I don't think that's it. If it was, then there would still be bodies. Every year the

animals get stronger, and more races disappear. Now it seems like the only animals left are either small and agile or large and terrifying. The real predators come at night. They've left my clan alone, but sometimes I saw large shadows around our village and I knew that something was watching us.

John tells the story of his encounter with what he calls a sha'dwarg. It sounds frightening, but when I look at Bob I'm somehow not scared. No, I think there's something else here, something much worse. Maybe a group of somethings.

I've seen humans and at one point I've even snuck up on their camps. How is it that they still live? It's almost like something is sparing them. Do they taste bad to it? I've also noticed that their nature seems to be changing. My father tells me stories about about humans from when he was a young gob. He tells me that when game was abundant there were times when humans would approach our village for trade. That's part of the reason we still know a bit of their language.

After John brought me back I was able to think more clearly. I was suddenly aware of concepts I had never thought of before and I assigned words to things that were nameless in our language. The more I think about things. The more that I'm convinced that there's something hiding somewhere manipulating us. It plays clan against clan, and turns brother against brother as it had done with the Kobolds. The more I consider it the more questions I have.

When I think about it, there is only one person to ask, the oldest of us all. Fura, as a dryad would have been almost immortal, and I'm sure she's seen many races. She may be the only one who knows what actually happened. If only she was not such an idiot. I imagine that she sees races as flavors and wouldn't be able to tell me anything.

As my mind filled with such thoughts I drifted off to sleep.

I had a dream. The smell of smoke overwhelmed my senses. I tried to move, but something held me in place. I

heard screams and as the smoke cleared I saw my father, my little sister and brother, burning.

No! I don't want to be forced to watch as my family slowly suffered. Their bodies blackened and I knew that there was no longer hope for them to live, but they just kept screaming as parts of them turned to ash and fell.

Then, Red was there in front of me. I called out for him to save them, but when he turned he was holding a massive axe. As he swung it towards me I cried for John.

I felt something warm and opened my eyes. John was there holding me in his arms. He looked tired.

He began stroking my hair. "I'm here."

He wiped the tears from my eyes and held me close. "It's been a busy night for me. Are you feeling any better?"

I squeezed him tightly as he leaned down and we kissed.

I looked up to the sky, it was lighter, maybe a few hours before daybreak.

He lifted me up. "Come on, we'll go get you something to eat."

When we got to the supplies, Liz, Leera and our daughters were all there. Leera was preparing a lite breakfast of oats and butter but she seemed a little lost on how to cook them.

I preferred meat, but recently I had taken a liking to this bread stuff, maybe I will like oats as well. I had seen humans feeding them to their horses before, so they must not be too bad.

I plopped down next to Liz and we all just sat there staring at each other. I yawned, but I didn't want to go back to sleep. Why was Red trying to kill me in my dream?

Liz leaned towards me. "Did you have nightmares too?"

"How did you know?"

"We all did, that's why we're up so early."

"Father heard me, in my dream!" Rosie chimed in.

I just stared at her. "How is this possible?"

"John told me that if I ever needed him, all I have to do is think of him and wish for him to come." Blondie added.

I rose and ran to John. "This must be an ill omen, we shouldn't march today!"

He hugged me close. "Why's that? Last night was hard, most of you relived some troubling memories but I don't think that affects anything we're trying to do now. If anything it made it clear that we need to move sooner, this place is stained by their filth."

He glanced off in the distance and appeared to be thinking. "But we should proceed with caution. Though, after last night, the whisper in my head has become a desperate scream that seems to say the same thing over and over. I've got people to kill."

With that he left and began waking everyone up.

I walked back over to Liz, "we must be careful today, we're all in danger."

Liz looked back at me, but her face showed something different than mine. She was excited.

We finished eating in silence as we all seemed to be lost in our own worlds.

I definitely do not like these oat things, are they supposed to be this hard?

I mounted Liz and we rounded up our group. I commanded them to travel with their bows unslung. That way when trouble struck we would have that extra second to react. As for Liz, I knew she was ready. If anything she was eager for a chance to kill something.

I was with her that night in the forest around our village. I still remember her laughter as she skewered man after man with her magics. When they got close I would make my daggers drool red or shoot them with an arrow through their eye. We were a team, and we were good. We fought and they screamed, that was it.

I had never seen this Leera fight, but she seemed confident enough. Lina was fierce, though we hadn't seen

eye to eye, she bested me during my test. If John hadn't stopped us, I might have been the one screaming. Because of that, I still felt bitter towards her, though the night that John claimed us, she gave me the dominant role which made up for it a bit.

We approached Leera who was muttering something to herself about how she could have sworn she cooked them right.

We exchanged glances and I spoke, "please, watch over him. If I fall today, make sure he takes another mate from our clan, we must live on."

She gave me a wry smile. "I always do, just as I watch over each of you and our daughters. All I do, is watch."

We once again took her to John's group. When we returned to mine, the march started. We kept going until the we began to bake under the midday sun. John called a stop and Liz and I relaxed in the shade. We had long run out of things to talk about so we usually sat in silence.

"How's your dark dagger spell coming along?" She asked while sipping some water.

"Ach, I have not really had time to practice it." I focused my energy into my hand while thinking of one of my daggers. The shape formed and I tossed it into the ground a few feet in front of us.

She smiled at me. "Wow! Nex, that's not bad."

"You may not think so, but any farther than that and the dagger dissolves before it can hit anything."

"That's still useful, maybe as a bluff?"

"Why bluff when I can just throw a real one."

She thought for a moment and looked from my daggers to my hand. "Try doing it over your regular dagger."

I shrugged and drew one of my daggers. When I focused I found it was a little easier because I didn't have to visualize it.

She clapped. "You just enchanted it!"

"I am sorry, I just what?"

"Try throwing it."

I threw it a few feet in front of us. The blackness spread out around the hole in the ground, and lingered there for a few moments. I picked it back up and examined it. It seemed normal now.

She watched as I turned the dagger in my hand. "Hmm, maybe not enchanted, but if I knew the runes for darkness I bet you could make the effects permanent. I should talk to the necromancer, I bet he knows."

I stopped her. "Not now, we have more important things to do."

She looked a little disappointed, but she nodded.

Lina landed in front of us.

"He says we're moving again!" she said before jumping back into the air.

I turned to Liz. "Why doesn't he use Bob for this, he's even faster than you. With him we would all know in a matter of minutes."

She laughed. "Do you really want Bob suddenly appearing behind you? Don't you remember what happened last time?"

I rubbed the back of my head. "Good point, let's get everyone ready."

The marching resumed. We traveled for maybe a few hours until Red's group stopped in front of us and we couldn't continue.

I dismounted Liz and walked over to my father. "What's happening, where is Lina?"

"I'm not sure my dear. The Phalanx stopped, so we stopped."

We made our way to the side and found one of Athen's men. "What's going on?"

"John says he smells something." The man replied with a shrug.

I thought back to this morning and a shiver ran up my spine.

"Liz! We need to get to John!"

As Liz ran to me there was a blinding flash of light and an ear splitting boom as a gust of hot air washed over us.



## Chapter 18: Chaos

Time and time again, I am here.

I see her. My Goddess of Chaos.

She says she is me, that she is all things combined, yet none at all. She is the force of creation, yet she embraces destruction.

Yet destruction does not exist. We simply pass from one phase to another. Our bodies become fuel, which becomes energy. Our energy diffuses and becomes many things all at once.

I approached her. She is all things, she appears as every race, every gender all at once. She allows me to embrace her.

As I enter her I can feel the feeling of all women, it's overwhelming. I come immediately.

An old man watches, his wrinkled hands clutch as his eyes twinkle at our union.

She says that there is only one match for her. Only one that she loves, but he is nothing. Without him, she says she could not exist.

She tells me that she has been me, an infinite number of lifetimes ago and that our child will be me as well.

She says that no other life has been reborn as many times as me. No other being has kept its identity and remembered as much.

I ask, aren't you cheating on him, the one you love?

She says no, how can she cheat with herself. She says again, all things are her, unless they are him, and there is only one, that is him.

I feel it again. The burning, an endless time spent in immeasurable pain. She says that's only the beginning. I still have so much suffering yet to do.

Though, I think, is it me who is going to suffer or is it her?

She sheds a single tear, but isn't it me who is crying? Am I crying for her?

No! she says, it is for him. She only cries for him. He will suffer and there will never be an end. Someday he will kill everything he loves. Someday he will be alone.

She tells me it's a cycle, one that cannot repeat forever, but has happened many times now. She has watched him die, over and over again. But he cannot die, he cannot escape.

He made himself mortal, but what he is cannot be made to last.

I kiss her and feel her yield. I feel her give herself to me, her untold power of one who can never be named.

She has been every person at all times yet she longs for nothing, a release from her long burdened existence.

In many ways she is him, but she says he is different. She tells that in all of her lives, this is the only time he has chosen to live. That this is the only time he wishes to feel.

She says he has created new lives. Lives that have never taken on the role they now face. The long dead, those who died without ever making a dent on reality are now set to change everything.

Across all the realities and all the worlds that she created, there is now only this one moment in time. A paradox has been formed, can death die?

She feels her end is near as she goes into labor.

How much time have I been here? How much time have I spent with her, with me?

Our child is born, but when I look at him, I know he is me. Over and over he is me, in time he will do the same as I have done, just as I have done it.

I look at my hands, they are old and wrinkled. Just then I notice a youthful specter, is that our child. I look at him with pride as he enters her.

Again I am born. He asks her the same questions that I have asked and she gives the same answers that I have received but this time he asks something else.

"How can I save him? How can I protect John?"

My vision goes dim and I know that I am dying.

I remember John, and I remember when he died, because it was also the time that I died. The time when all things died.

"I will help you my son, take this gift from a man who accomplished nothing. Take this from a person with no reason to be." And as I spoke a fragment of life that could only be me, could only be her, left me.

My son will succeed where I have failed. My son will save our mother's love, the one who cannot be constrained.

With that everything turned to black.

I felt my fragment reach him, reach me.

I will die a proud father.

She embraced me as she had so many times now, and with a kiss I start again.

## Chapter 19: Attack - Leera

We rode for so long, John seemed restless as he held me.

"After last night I can't stomach the thought of what they're doing to those children." He said as he pulled me closer.

I was his strength. I was the only one he confided everything in. As we rode he told me of his life, the life before we met.

"I don't think I was exactly who I remember being. Mors has been restoring my memory. Last night I had a dream as well, I've seen more of my life in that world, things after the ambulance."

I still couldn't figure out how much of him was this person from another world, or how much was his god. I only knew that I loved him as he is now.

Bob stopped suddenly, "Boss! Call a stop!"

John began sniffing the air, "Stop! I smell something! Lina, scout the area."

John had us dismount. We all stood there in silence for the next several minutes. His eyes glowed as he scanned the forest around us.

"It smells like rain. Maybe a storm, there's also something else, sulfur?"

I tried to smell it but my sense of smell though heightened, only seemed to lock onto the smell of death. Was there an ability that he hadn't given me yet?

Bob stood and shoved us with all his might.

The world spun as I flew back. The next thing I felt was a jarring hit as I impacted with a group of bodies.

There was an ear shattering boom, and something warm wrapped around me. A heat unlike anything I knew washed

over me and I felt my skin begin to sizzle off. I screamed as I tucked my face into this thing that was around me.

It finally stopped, it was only a second, but it seemed to last a lifetime. I used my self heal and opened my eyes. I saw armor with two holes in the front, it was John's.

I looked up to his face. His eyes were tightly shut in a pained expression.

When I sat up I saw something terrible. John's back as well as the back of his head was gone, burned away in an instant.

I looked to where Bob was, only to see a smoldering pile. The men behind me were all on the ground, some weren't moving and some were rolling around screaming while the ones in the back were clutching their faces in pain.

There was nothing but confusion and screaming all around me as I ran into the forest towards some far away voices that spoke in a language I didn't know.

There, I saw Lina cut to ribbons. Her unborn child crushed and spread amongst her entrails.

In a rage I managed to kill two men before their magic forced me to retreat back into the forest.

They were all mounted on horses and armored to the teeth.

Back towards our army, I heard Liz scream John's name, then the sky was blocked by a massive glacier.

It flew towards the men and hit some invisible wall. The force from it blew me back and caused me to have to heal myself again.

I ran back to her and John, grabbing Lina on the way. John had managed to reform from his fallen men, leaving only their heads.

When he saw what I was carrying he went berserk. He charged like a mad man, but an invisible wall stopped him as their magics began to cut into him.

Strange blades flew from the hooded men inside the wall and struck indiscriminately around the battlefield.

I heard someone crying out, and saw Languoria cradling Ralpus's shredded body. She stood with murder in her eyes and disappeared into the fray.

There was an explosion from inside the barrier and for a moment it fell. I looked for John, but all I saw were bloody pieces of mangled flesh.

There was a scream from one of the hooded men and a strange bone creature wrapped him as he began attacking his own men from behind. He was surrounded in an all too familiar golden light. It looked like they were trying to heal him, but a man with an axe cut into him instead. He ripped out a white ball and tossed it to a leather-clad man on a leaner horse.

As the man took off into the forest I saw Languoria standing amongst the carnage. We locked eyes and she screamed that the white thing was John.

I ran into the forest and sat Lina's remains in a safe place. I caught up with the man by the road. I killed his horse and as he fell I killed him as well.

I drew the man's sword and thrust it into his chest. I pulled his ribs apart and pushed John's ball into the wound.

Slowly the hole closed and the face reformed. It stood and smiled at me before it pressed it's hand to the horse. It began ripping off it's armor and tossing it to the side as the two bodies began to merge into a bloody clump.

From that mass of gore something began to stir. The first thing I saw were teeth, long and horrible, it's mouth was open in a silent scream as the head emerged. It had those eyes that I knew and loved, but above them were another set, blue ones. The hulking form stood and the blood that was dripping from it melted into its skin.

Its arms were massive things of grotesque muscle, and it had four of them, though the two on the back were smaller. It's legs had a reverse joint and it's knuckles had large curved spikes jutting out from them. In it's forearms I saw the shapes of two massive bone spears.

He opened his mouth and a low growl emerged sending chills down my spine as he turned and began feasting on all that was left.

He looked at me as blood dripped down his face. "Leera, take me to Lina."

I took him there and told him about what I found inside her. He deserved to know about the child they stole from us.

He held her body softly as he wept. She reformed in his arms and his eyes shone with grim resolve, then, he was gone.

## Chapter 20: Retribution - John

Killed! They killed my child! Lina... How much she wanted to be a mother. She carried life inside her, and they just ripped it away! I'm not holding anything back! Burning is too good, no, they will feel the void, for millions of years. I will show them an eternity of nothing... I will consume them!

"Master! Calm down! You have to think!"

I used the calming effect and looked at the soul of a horrified battle-mage.

I converted it to mana.

That heal spell earlier had drained me, paralyzed me and depleted more than half my mana.

Mana 4,786/10,221

I had already absorbed his wind blades spell, but I had no elemental affinities, so it was weak when I cast it earlier.

I looked at the barrier spell.

Barrier: Level 1 - Wind Attuned

Active - targeted, toggle.

The size of the barrier affects the mana required for casting and maintaining the spell.

The barrier spell is often the first spell taught to a battle-mage with a high affinity for elemental magics. It works in several different forms, and each element has its own version. A mage who is knowledgeable in different elements may even attune the barrier to block another element. In cases where the elements match they will likely cancel each other out, nullifying the attacking spell. Such as lightning impacting a lightning barrier or a fireball hitting a fire barrier. Using an opposing element may also have a similar effect, but in those cases it's a matter of the level of spells used and the amount of mana put into each.



In the case of the wind barrier, it will cancel out wind spells and hinder physical attacks. It also grants an immunity from unenchanted arrows and non-magical projectiles. The drawback is that attacks and projectiles cannot be launched from inside the barrier either, often leading to stalemates and battles of attrition.

Wind barriers are weak to fire and may become explosive if not disabled when hit with a strong fire spell.

I thought back to the explosion that killed me. I don't remember seeing any fireballs coming at me from the sky. I doubt this world has any bombs or concealed explosive devices.

I remembered smelling ozone and sulfur.

"Mors, can a wind barrier be used offensively in any way? Can it be created at a distance from the caster?"

"Yes master, a tactic that is considered to be cruel but effective is to cast the barrier around someone without magic and filter out the oxygen. If they're unable to break out of the barrier they will suffocate inside."

"If they're able to filter oxygen, can they control their shape or the gas that's inside of them?"

"Yes master."

"So if they made a wind barrier the size of a football field and constricted it into a small ball only keeping oxygen and flammable gases, could they make a bomb?"

"It's possible."

"What about a small fire barrier inside of the wind barrier?"

"...That might work."

A picture started to form in my mind. They had probably scouted us while we slept, and waited in ambush. But how could they know which way we would go and how did they stand up to Liz's ice?

I remembered seeing eight robed men and at least twice as many in heavy armor. None had any clothing or items to

tie them to an element. I guess it would be asking too much for the wind mages to wear green or the fire mages to wear red and so on.

I was also hit with a heal from someone at the command of the one with the special axe but I didn't see who it came from.

The book fairy wasn't lying, heals hurt, for a while there I couldn't move or use any spells. I could only imagine what it would be like to be hit with a resurrection. I have to be careful not to let any of my enemies know I'm undead. So I guess no more becoming a crawling bone creature.

Their commander seemed to be fairly knowledgeable, and recognized that I was undead, but why did he not destroy me. How did I end up back on the road with Leera putting me inside of a lone rider?

The only things I can think of are, either he was told not to kill me, or he thought I might explode since I used the corpse explosion spell a few times.

I need to come up with a strategy here. Mors and I passed ideas back and forth until we came up with a way to filter out their oxygen secretly.

"Threscia, could that spell Thrall taught you pass through their magic?"

"Maybe if they were unaware of it, but Thrall warned us about barriers stopping his magic."

I nodded as a plan formed.

I opened my eyes and resumed my charge. There is nothing I wouldn't do for my people, and they had stolen something precious from me, a life that would have been loved. Lina was to be a mother, now when she learns of this loss, she may never be the same.

My Lina, smiling, happy, beautiful, she's come a long way from the shy person she was. Though it hurts me, to her it will be a blow she may never overcome. We will have other children, but she will always wonder what the first one would've been. Would he be a strong man like me, or a

beautiful woman like her? It's something that we will never know, a life that should have been, will never be now.

I felt my rage fill me once more, my legs pumped as I resumed my mad dash for the battlefield.

"Boss!"

I stopped. A strange specter stood before me. It was in a constant state of change, it shuddered and phased uncontrollably, taking on many forms at once.

"Take my soul, I'm livin' on borrowed time here!"

I used Soul Steal. The only clue I had to its identity was that it called me boss.

...Bob, I'll bring you back when this is over.

I leapt using these legs that no biped should have. I saw a view of the battle, Liz looked haggard, her clothes were ripped and bloody in places and her glaciers had become spears, though she still launched them without stopping.

Nex was in front of her group as they shot arrow after arrow, though none got through.

The Phalanx pressed forward beside my group, trying in vain to penetrate the enemies defenses. Blue was hurling trees and boulders that didn't fare any better than the arrows.

I saw Languoria's broken form resting atop Ralphus's bloody remains.

I ran towards them, she rared back and opened her mouth in a scream that cried death. She reminded me of when I first saw her as a zombie.

She covered Ralphus with her body, her twisted arms falling uselessly at her sides.

"Lang, it's me! I'll fix him."

She looked up with tearful eyes as she fell to the side.

I used Soul Steal and Ralphus's soul flowed into me.

I mended his body back together and fixed his remaining injuries. I imparted all abilities and used blend.

"Mors, english."

I infused his soul.

Before he opened his eyes I spoke to Languoria.

"You can't face him that way, come here."

She limped towards me and I mended her broken limbs as Ralphus woke.

His eyes saw me first, and he shrieked that girlish scream he had done earlier in the forest.

"Sorry Ralph, it's me."

He regained his composure as Languoria hugged him.

I explained to him what we were up against.

He cleared his throat and looked at me. "Wind blades huh, we must be dealing with battle-mages. It's sad that I was caught off guard by one of those half-assed magics. They're just muscle-heads with mana."

Languoria helped him sit up as he gazed at the battle.

He brought his hand to his face and shook his head. "Damned barriers, and elemental ones at that. They must be scared."

"Do you know a counter that I could use for their wind blades?"

"Of course, it's simple magic. You just hit it with pretty much any other spell and it will disappear on impact."

"What if I hit it with another wind blade?"

"You don't pair wind with wind, It may change the attack trajectory, but it wouldn't cause it to disperse."

"Thanks Ralphus, I think I have a plan. Please protect whoever you can when they fire their volleys."

Ralphus nodded and placed his mask back on as he stood wreathed in green fire.

I approached Red. The horned giant eyed me discerningly before taking a knee. "My Lord."

"In your opinion, how are we faring?"

"Moral took a hit when you fell earlier, but your men's display of selfless strength spurred the rest into action. We're pushing in on the barrier with the Phalanx and with each passing second their mana ticks off, while our stamina still holds strong. They've stopped shooting their pathetic

spells at us and I feel it's only a matter of time until we break through."

"What of their armored cavalry?"

"That could be a problem. If they were to suddenly drop all defenses and focus on offense, they would have an edge for a time but they would need to time it between arrows and ice. I'm guessing they're waiting for us to run out of resources."

"Tell Liz and Nex to stop their attacks, but keep pressing with the Phalanx. We'll force an artificial lull, and when they think they're clear to charge they'll have a nasty surprise."

We nodded to each other and with a leap I began assaulting the barrier. They greeted me with a fresh group of wind blades.

As I shot my blades to counter them I infused them with darkness.

Two massive, yet incredibly slow moving blades formed and moved towards the incoming wind blades. They connected and the wind dispersed. At least they served their purpose.

"Threscia, use Plague Swarm!"

The arms on my back moved and I could hear chanting in my head as a grotesque spell passed through the barrier and entered a hooded rider. A moment later, I erected a barrier of my own inside of theirs and began filtering out all the oxygen.

They didn't seem to notice. The mages kept focusing on their barriers and the cavalry just looked smugly down at us from their horses.

I continued expanding and shrinking my barrier forcing more oxygen out as I looked for the plague swarm. It was in the back, contained with the dead mage in its own barrier. I used Corpse Explosion, shattering the small neglected barrier around it.

The spell immediately attached itself to another mage, draining the life from him as his screams were muffled by

another barrier cast over him.

Good, as long as they're paying attention to that, they won't notice what I'm doing.

I saw the trapped mage glow gold every now and then. I see, they won't let him die. They don't want a repeat of last time, no matter how much he screams. They'll focus on keeping him alive to save themselves.

That's fine with me, just another thing they need to spend their mana on.

Liz's ice stopped, followed my Nex's arrows a few moments later.

The leader with the long axe seemed skeptical and they maintained their barriers until some of the horses began to stumble and a few of the riders fell.

"How? They have us in a barrier!" He yelled out. "Destroy it, then attack as soon as it's down!"

They got into position, the heavy cavalry faced the Phalanx and the mages lined up behind them.

They formed a small wedge formation and as my barrier shattered they charged. The Phalanx was spread thin at only two men deep and the wedge cut through the middle of them like butter.

Blue was waiting and with a loud whoosh he swung a large tree at them toppling several riders.

There were sudden screams from the back as Athen's group attacked the mages from behind with bloody efficiency.

The leader charged to the front and met Blue's swing with his axe, shattering the tree in a rain of splinters.

As I thought, it's a magic weapon.

The barrier holding the dying mage and Plague Swarm shattered as the spell shot towards Athen.

"Threscia cancel it!"

The swarm dissipated and Athen continued his attack, oblivious to the danger he was just in.

I crashed into the thickest part of the cavalry, reaching up and ripping men free of their horses.

"John, there!" Threscia yelled.

I saw a single mage staring at me in contempt. There was a slight golden glow to him and I knew he was probably the one that healed me earlier.

I may not have much luck with magical projectiles, but I've got some experience with human ones.

I threw one of the toppled riders as the cleric in disguise began chanting.

I reached the fallen cleric and pinned him down. I sunk my teeth into his throat and his skin parted as I tore into him.

His body twitched and his arms struggled in my grasp as I fed.

A deep yell came from behind me.

I turned to see Blue clutching his chest as an axe was drawn down his body splitting him.

The commander looked at me with rage as he brought his horse around. He saw the crumpled body in my hands and screamed. "Yurich!"

I heard the pain in his voice as he slung his axe, spraying the ground with Blue's blood.

I reached my hand underneath the frail man I had been feeding on and forced it where no hand should go. I tore through his insides until my thumb was under his thin jaw and my fingers where in his sinuses.

"Oh, hi there Leader, don't worry 'bout me, I'm just dead." I said putting on my first ever ventriloquist act.

He roared in rage and charged.

"Wow leader, there was a lot of room in there, what have you two been doing?"

He swung recklessly as he shrieked incoherently. I dodged his axe and shot my spike into his horse between a gap in it's armor.

The horse faltered and fell in a tumble, rolling over its rider.

The man groaned and got to his knees ripping off his dented breastplate.

"Gee, I have a fun idea, how would you like to say goodbye?"

I fleshcrafted the cleric's body around my hand and infused his soul. He gasped and spat blood.

"Tris... tus?" it said as the knight's eyes went wild with rage. "Kill... Me..."

"Oh, so your name is Tristus. Well, Tristus, would you like to see me do it again while drinking a glass of water?"

I began moving his jaw again as his feeble hands began clawing at his bloated throat. "Sir Tittless, please save me!"

Tristus reached out his hand uselessly as I clenched my fist and ejected my spike through the youth's head.

"Oh my, this bracelet doesn't fit at all, I guess I should return it." I said as I tossed the limp corpse at the knight.

"That was my brother you monster!" He shrieked at me.

"Then you know where I'm coming from. Today you took a future from me, you stole a life that hadn't even felt the sun on its face. I would say we're even, but there's no way that's true is it. He had a chance, you had a choice. You killed mine in her mother's womb."

He laid the body down and shut its eyes before standing to face me. "You're dead!"

"I am indeed, a few times now. But let's stop all this pointless talk. My other arm is feeling a little cold, and I'm planning an encore performance for your men."

I felt the wind distort and turned to see two more wind blades flying at me. I launched two dark blades to counter them, but before I could turn back I felt his axe tearing through my back. I looked down to see it protruding through my chest.

I laughed and turned with force tossing the knight.



"Did you really think I would put my core back in the same place?"

The knight rose and gave me a shocked expression.

"I'll take that as a yes, so, what's your plan now? Because if it doesn't involve a painful death and an eternity of suffering you may need to make some adjustments."

"You just wait monster!" He closed his eyes and began chanting as His axe started to glow blue.

I charged forward and swung my fist upward towards his face. There was a resounding clang as his helm flew off and he was knocked into the air.

I recognize a special move when I see it. Did he think I was going to let it happen? If I did that, I would deserve to die.

I reached down and grabbed his ankle and whipped his body into the ground. He impacted head first, followed by the rest and released a pained noise as he stopped moving.

I rolled him over and heard the bones cracking and snapping as his body caved in on itself.

"Monster... You have no..."

"Puppet, I know. Let's fix that."

I'll remember those next screams for the rest of my life. I kept him alive as I slowly forced my arm through him.

Time to start the show!

I stood puppet in hand. "Tell them to surrender or I'll do it for you!"

My puppet gagged and sputtered blood.

Hmm, maybe my hand is too high.

My ears barely perceived a noise like a low mutter or a prayer.

Chanting!

I turned in time to see a blinding golden light. I felt my soul being pulled out of sync with my body.

My world began to spin as I fell to my knees.

The last thing I saw before my vision went black were the battered bodies of the slain mages rising.

Fuck, it's a resurrection spell, the boy wasn't the only cleric!

## Chapter 21: Haunted - John

I downed another can of cheap beer and lit a cigarette, breakfast of champions.

I've been laid off for almost a year now. I tossed the can onto a massive pile of cans in the corner, causing an avalanche of aluminum.

I looked up at the pictures that still hung on my wall. Pictures of my wife and I, smiling, happy and still together.

I still remember the turning point that led to all this. I had a minor heart attack and a stroke, after that my performance at work got sloppy. Soon they were handing me my walking papers, telling me they would call me back later and I should take this as time to recover.

In other words, laid off indefinitely instead of fired outright, probably because they feared a lawsuit. It was okay by me, six months of unemployment and the freetime to pursue the things I actually cared about.

Harold and I had been working on a game that used EEG and controlled hallucination. I had gained some experience with EEGs after the stroke and coding was always a hobby of mine. Of course that's not to say I was any good at it, especially since most of it these days was done drunk and half asleep.

But I once read somewhere that Einstein used to lay down with two steel balls in his hands and when they clanged against the floor he would awaken and work some more.

I did the same thing, but without the steel balls. Of course, if my balls hit the floor I'm sure I would wake up as well.

Harold was passionate about our 'game' but the truth of it is that you were basically sleeping with some binary

sounds and flashing lights that corresponded to your active brain areas to try to elicit a state of controlled lucid dreaming.

That being said, there was no way to tell if it actually was doing anything, other than the saved EEG readings.

I tried to explain it to him. There's no gameplay footage, no graphics, and no marketability but he had already cashed out his IRAs and sold all his stocks to try to make a mass produced model. He's an idiot to put so much faith in someone who has no faith in themselves, but I couldn't complain. Unemployment ran out six months ago and he had been paying me to keep up the good work. Of course part of that was testing it out on myself.

The good news, I had regained the use of my leg and partial use of my left hand. My pinky was still a rebel, but the only people I had to have tea parties with were sex dolls. Thanks for the money Harold, I finally have a harem, dear god I hope I don't have another heart attack while they're all out of the box and posed in various states or use. But hell, I'll be dead so I guess it doesn't matter.

The bad news, I've been having waking dreams and microsleep. It gets worse when I drink, but sometimes I found it entertaining. I would sit and watch the walls melt. I also seem to be getting more and more aggravated over little things. For whatever reason, usually around mid-day, my neighbor likes to play 'Livin' in the sunlight'.

There's also my neighbors downstairs. I swear to god if I hear techno at top volume after midnight again I'm going to kill them. It's like they just put it on repeat and pass out, because sometimes it plays well into the next day. I'm also pretty sure they're drug dealers with all the traffic that comes and goes there. I've called the cops a few times, but they just knock, shrug and walk away.

"Ma..ster."

Ah, the delusions are happening earlier today. Lately I've been experiencing quite a few side effects. I've lost hours or

even a day or two of memory. You would think I would be alarmed, but I'm a heavy drinker and a stroke patient, it's hard to tell the exact cause. I'm probably the worst person there is to test this thing.

"Mas...ter!"

There's one funny thing about this though, I've never hallucinated a voice before. I thought about telling Harold about these side effect before, but he's testing it as well and claims that he even remembers the dreams he gets from the helmet.

"John... co..me"

Damn these ones are persistent.

He tells me when he sleeps with the helmet he's an apprentice necromancer in some fantasy dystopia. He says he gets to summon zombies and... sew outfits. Well, different strokes for different folks.

For me, I have no memory at all of my dreams when I wear the helmet, it's just blackness. I know that before the helmet I used to have dreams, usually involving me and anthropomorphic dwarven ladies in a pool of lube. I would play metal on my literal axe and then we would fly away on dragons... That would then also turn into ladies but they usually ended up dancing to techno as I awoke to yell pointlessly at my floor. Damn neighbors, is it even called techno anymore or is it dubstep? Really who listens to this shit outside of the club?

I would sleep during the day, but my other neighbor keeps playing god damned Tiny Tim, what is he a ukulele enthusiast? It always sounds like he's doing aerobics or something, maybe tossing weights. Strange choice of workout music if you ask me.

I've seen him at the mailbox a few times, short hairy guy. Always calls me boss or chief. Well, I guess it's better than champ or some other sport related slang. He gives me the creeps, yet he's somehow likable. He's one of those people that makes direct eye contact for way too long, and winks

after every other sentence like there's some in joke that you're not privy to, yet there's only us two talking.

"John... You'll die if ...!"

Is that a call from mortality, or just my own common sense. I ditched the blood pressure medication almost immediately when I found out I couldn't drink with it. I'm feeling a little dizzy. I think I'll go rub one out and take a nap, then when I wake up, if I wake up, I'll do some more coding on this damn 'game.'

This time when I woke up it was night-time, though I was sure it was just morning. Another blackout, huh. I sat back in my broken armchair and emptied another can of beer down my gullet as I looked over my work to see what I needed to do next. Harold had asked me for a name for our project. I had affectionately called it the Delirium Demo. He didn't seem to understand, but for me that was what it was, pure insanity.

Wow, at least this blackout was productive. There's three more pages of code here, spread across multiple chains. What the hell are all these qualifiers?

It's going to take me all night just to figure out what I was trying to do here. I yawned. Hmm, go back to sleep, or work. Tough choice, I think I'll take the sleep.

I laid back down in my king-sized bed, of which I used one fourth, the rest was occupied by dirty clothes and empty pizza boxes. I placed the helmet on my head. I guess I can check out these changes first hand.

When I opened my eyes, I was standing in a doorway, my pulse was racing. I looked down, I was holding my sword of the one winged angel, somehow I seem to have broken it in half somewhere. The hell!? I was covered in blood as blue and red lights flashed from the parking lot.

Well, this can't be good.

I heard indistinct shouting, something about getting on the ground.

"Master, please, before it's too late."

I heard gunshots and felt something impacting against me. I looked down.

Shit! I'm leaking. Have I been shot!? It felt numb, I thought this would hurt more.

"Master!!!"

Wait a minute, I can't die like this, I left the dolls out. I turned to run back into the apartment. That's when I figured out where the blood came from. The girl was cut to shreds, the guy was pinned down to his chair with the other half of my sword coming out of his gut.

I gagged. I recognized them, my druggie neighbors. I struggled to draw in air and my heart beat faster than I had ever known it could, though I still felt like I was going to pass out soon.

Something else was in the room, something evil, lurked in the shadows. My legs started to give out.

Shit! I can't let it end like this. I crawled to the girl, she was too mangled to fix. I used Soul Steal I'd have to make her a new body later.

The guy, Sid, I think his name was, still seemed to be breathing, he was only stabbed. I crawled over to him and pulled the fragmented blade out of him. I used fleshcrafting and mended what I could as reality started to turn white.

"This you isn't you anymore. Even if he dies, you don't. Remember who you are."

Ah, yes, I remember that little fairy I made. What was her name again?

"Yeah yeah, Mors, do you want me to give you infinite lives again?"

"Um... If it will get you to come back, then yes."

"Deal."

## Chapter 22: Returned - John

I opened my eyes. The battlefield had once again turned to chaos. I heard screams and shouts all around me as a robed man dug into my chest with a dagger.

Like I told the last guy, it's not there dumbass. Huh!? My words didn't come out.

I can't move!

I felt the arms on my back jerk.

"Threscia! Can you move?"

"I seem to be able to move a bit, but I only have control of these two arms."

That's right, if what the book fairy said was true then I died, and was resurrected in my former body. The body that I used to have, but how the hell am I back here again if that's the case?

I felt the cold embrace once again. It seemed to say that we can never be separated.

During the last seconds there I think I was using my abilities! How is that possible?

It clutched me tighter.

Then did any of that actually happen, or was it all in my head?

The soul screen came up.

Soul of a crazed warlock: 11%

Soul of a loyal sex fiend: 82%

Fragment of Chaos: 0.0001%

Soul of Caroline: 100%

I felt the black liquid begin to drip.

It all happened.



"Threscia, there's a body attached to my left arm, are you still able to use my fleshcrafting?"

"I see what you're getting at, I'll try!"

That mage, or is it cleric? Dammit, why did they all have to wear the same grey robes! Either way he won't find the core there, it's in my skull. This form is undead only, it didn't need a full brain. Only the parts for motor control and perception.

I felt my arm and the body start to merge. The robed one didn't seem to notice as he desperately sloughed through my organs.

Soon I saw glowing blue eyes and an ear-to-ear smile behind him as a large bone spike suddenly protruded from the man's forehead making the second most disturbing unicorn I had ever seen.

She did a cute girly wave, then grabbed his dagger and began to sever my head.

It's sad when you get used to stuff like this. With a twist and a yank I was free. She raised the loose fitting chain-mail she was wearing and cradled me to her breasts as I merged into her body.

Soon I was seeing things through her eyes as she looked around her. "I can tell I'm not at a hundred percent, but at least I can move."

A large fully armored man with a sword and shield came running towards her. I'm guessing he lost his horse in the battle. She flung the mages body at him, the impact knocked him to the ground.

"John special number one! Body fling!"

"Come on Threscia, do you really have to name my moves?"

"Nope!" She replied cheerfully.

The man moved the body off of him and struggled to get up in his heavy armor.

"John special number two! Choke and punch!"

"Really? You're going to call that a special?"

"Well, you've done it enough that it might as well be a signature move. Actually I guess it should be number one."

She leapt at him tackling him back to the ground and did just as she promised. The man still had his sword and shield, but the sword couldn't make any gashes in the loose chain-mail she wore and his shield was pinned against him.

All I heard was a series of clanging as she punched him mercilessly, then a snap as he exhaled one last time, his neck caving in.

I noticed one of her hands had the curved bone knuckles of the hand she had absorbed, her other arm had the massive bone spike I made.

I heard chanting again. "Look out, chanting!"

She quickly scanned the area spotting an isolated mage. He looked calm even though his comrades were falling all around him.

"Be careful of this one, he seems to be a veteran."

The mage locked eyes with us as he continued to chant.

"John special nu-"

"No, just no, even if I didn't die from the resurrection spell earlier, you're going to kill me with this stuff."

She shrugged, "Petrifying Gaze."

The mage's body straightened as he fell from his horse. She was on him in seconds and he soon had a hole where his face used to be.

She looked around, Red had taken Blue's earlier position and seemed to be faring much better. The rest of the goblin elites including Reginald looked to be holding their own against the few cavalry that slipped through, dodging blows and toppling horses.

A large explosion of ice erupted in the middle of the enemy and many of them fell, dead or injured, I couldn't tell.

More were screaming as daggers protruded from the open spaces of their helms.

Athen's group seemed to have done a fine job of wiping out the mages, as all around us lay robed bodies.

I saw something white and jagged sticking out of the ground over by where the barrier used to be.

"There it is, grab my weapon!"

She darted towards it and hefted it up before charging at the unprotected backs of the cavalry. She slashed at the horses rear legs and as the riders fell she brought it down on their heads, crushing their helms inwards.

She continued to attack from the rear as Red attacked from the front and the Phalanx pressed in from the sides. Soon the cavalry fell and the sounds of battle ceased. All around us, all that could be heard were the groans of the injured and dying.

Now that the excitement had stopped I felt my consciousness fading. "I'll leave it up to you, I'm going to sleep for a while."

"Wait, what about..." Threscia's voice faded away.

## Chapter 23: Recovery - John

"Master, please lie down here."

"Where am I, why is there a bed here?"

"This is my space within you."

"Why do you have a normal sized bed?"

Mors refused to meet my gaze and fiddled with her hands. "I thought you may need it someday."

I lied back on her bed and noticed a lump under my pillow. I reached my hand down and pulled out a small doll. It was somehow familiar.

"Please put that away!" She yelled causing me to squeeze it.

It spoke, "Mors, I love you!"

...When I look at it more closely, isn't this me? Why is it anatomically correct?

We both looked at each other in silence.

I quickly stuffed the doll back under her pillows and pretended not to notice anything.

"You saw it, didn't you?"

"Nope, I saw nothing... Heh heh." I sighed. There's no way anyone would believe that.

"Good! Now about our deal." She said in a deep blush while playing with her hair nervously.

She looked downward and slowly floated over to me. "Please help yourself, I'm prepared."

Her eyes were shut tight and her small body was shaking while she panted.

This is bad, I'm turned on but she looks so uncomfortable. Not to mention this is like a thousand times worse then dating your co-worker. If things go wrong with her it'll be like having an ex that you can't escape from.

She looked at me tentatively, "It's okay Master, no matter what, I could never hate you. We are both one being."

Shit! I forgot she could read my mind. Isn't this worse, not to mention if we're one being isn't this basically masturbation? I'm reminded of a dance I did earlier.

She began to shake her tiny hips as tears began to form at the corners of her eyes, "Would you fu-"

"Stop! You don't even have anything to tuck. Wait a minute, that's not the point I was trying to make. I mean, nevermind. I need rest."

Her eyes returned to their cold neutral stare and she bowed. "As you wish Master, I exist to serve you."

I mentally sighed, I'm both relieved and disappointed. In a way I was hoping to see how far I could go with her.

She slowly began to remove her dress while keeping her shoes on. I felt a tightness that I knew I would need to relieve or I would go insane.

"Wait, why are you undressing?"

"I'm sorry Master, you seem to forget that I know what you're thinking and right now this is what you want and what I've longed for. Please be gentle with me."

She floated over and I held out my hand. She sat down and looked nervously at me.

"...Mors, how is this even going to work?"

"We can't, you know, but you can still touch me."

I played with her sensitive breasts for a while savoring her moans and shy reactions. I brought her to my mouth and began to lick her sensitive places between her legs, savoring her taste.

She arched her back and yelled in the throws of passion as she climaxed on my tongue and I tasted her sweet nectar.

As she caught her breath, I brought her slick body down to my waiting members.

She began to rub herself up and down my length, letting me savor the feeling of her soft body as it slid against me.

Though her body was small her breasts pressed in on the sides of my shaft and she had a softness that couldn't compare to normal flesh.

She moved her breasts along my head and began using her tongue on my sweet spot. It was a small amount of stimulation, but looking down at her milk white body with her legs wrapped around my shaft was enough to send me over the edge.

I came from her soft touch and coated her body.

She rubbed herself as she reveled in her accomplishment. As I watched her I felt myself getting turned on again. This was hot, but it wasn't satisfying.

A thought occurred to me then. My body was my last body, the body I had before making the undead monstrosity I last used. That means that this body must be based on my perception of myself.

That means I may be able to think of myself as smaller. I pulled out the doll to use as a reference and began to imagine myself as being that size.

Soon I felt a weight on top of myself and opened my eyes to see a full sized Mors straddling me.

She held her hands over her breasts as she looked softly into my eyes.

I returned her gaze and smiled. "You knew I could do this didn't you."

"Of course, but I knew you were eager to see what was possible with a fairy first. Your mind was filled with fantasies about what we could do and how we could do it. It was really turning me on, and now wasn't the first time either. You always imagine what it would be like when you look at me. We needed to do it that way at least once." She said as she smiled down at me.

I reached up, grabbed her ample hips and began lowering her onto my waiting members. She reached her

hand back and guided my rear one into her ass as I guided the front one.

She paused as I began to enter her. "Please be gentle... I haven't done this before."

I looked over to the doll, then back to her and cocked my eyebrow.

She blushed for a moment and spoke, "At least not with a person."

I resumed pulling her down. She closed her eyes as a soft moan escaped her. She really was the softest girl I've ever been with her insides pressed around me gently as I reached her depths.

I reached up and pulled her down into a kiss while we just enjoyed the feeling of being pressed together.

She let my tongue pass between her lips as her tongue caressed mine playfully.

I never thought I'd be able to make love with her. I felt myself throb inside her as her eyes went wide. I felt myself coming immediately. I gave myself into the pleasure and let it all flow inside her as I began to thrust my hips.

I don't know what's gotten in to me, this is just all too much. I would be ashamed if this didn't feel so good.

She moaned softly as she moved her hips slowly to match mine. I pulled her up and looked into her eyes as she began to moan. Soon I could feel my seed leaking out of her as we continued our motions.

The room was filled with sloppy sounds as she began to breath heavily on top of me. I grabbed her breasts in my hands and began to massage them. Her eyes opened wide and she began to move faster on top of me.

She placed her lips next to my ear and whispered, "Master, may I come?"

Her heavy breath and sweet voice in my ear brought me to a state of intoxication as I rolled her over and began thrusting wildly into her. "Beg for it!"

"P, please Master. Please let me Coome!"

"No, and if you do I'll punish you."

Her brows knit together and she bit her lip as she looked at my pleadingly.

I drove myself deep inside her and began to grind at an angle making sure my shaft was rubbing her clit.

I felt her body start to shake under me as her insides began to twitch around my girth. I could feel myself getting close a third time. I had no idea it would be this good.

"Pl... ease... Let.." She closed her eyes as she began spasming under me.

I completely stopped moving right as she was about to explode. She made a pained expression and looked at me with her purple eyes. "Please!"

I drove back into her, hard passing her second gate, but she was too far gone to react with anything other than pleasure. "Okay, come for me! Come hard! Let me hear it!"

I felt her clenching around me as her soft inside gripped me mercilessly. I let my seed go for a second time in her depths as she screamed and pulled me close. Her mouth was open as I felt her squirting, her juices pelted me as her mouth opened and closed in bliss.

I looked deep into her eyes as the last of my seed burst out into her. I reached down and we kissed as our orgasms kept going and I emptied myself.

I pulled up and smiled down at her. "So you're a squirter huh? You didn't ask permission to do that."

She blushed and pulled my head down between her breasts. It felt warm and safe. I soon felt myself losing conscience.

"Please rest Master, I'll always be here for you."



## Chapter 24: Report - Thads

I awoke in a cold sweat. Even though I was warm in this soft bed I still felt a cold terror that I just couldn't shake.

I winced, I had healed my injury, but the pain still felt fresh in my memory. The memory of the time my pride was crushed and I was reminded of just how weak I actually was.

It reminded me that I was made to be a victim. First by my family, then by Barneth. I was tossed aside, denied all my birthrights, then raped until I submitted. The only thing that had brought me any closure and the only thing that had helped me to feel like something other than a victim was making victims of others.

I was justified! Duke Andrus had told me so. He was the first person to help me, the first person in my entire life that seemed to care. Of course I knew that caring about someone makes you weak and the one thing I had learned above anything else is that the weak die. After encountering that monster I felt that death was always lurking, waiting for any chance to get me. I began shaking as a chill came over me.

I felt Andrus's hand on my face as he slowly stroked down my cheek to my chin. He sat up and pulled my face towards his as he kissed me.

I felt myself blushing and broke off our kiss suddenly. "You idiot! Why are you still here? What if someone catches us?"

He pressed his body against mine and I felt his warmth. "You needed me. I won't let my sweet Thads suffer alone."

I fought the urge to give in to his charm, "why're you still calling me that? I'm back from that excursion."

"You know these walls have ears, and those ears belong to people that want nothing more than your death. From

here on, Thads is your name. I don't know what I would do if they took you from me... I don't think I would be able to remain myself."

I rolled over to face him, as I looked into his eyes as his pupils expanded. "Don't you think Thads is a weak cover. I'm sure anyone with half a brain could figure that name out."

He made a pouty face "well, I think it's cute."

I gave him a little slap and he smiled at me.

"You know, without your beard you wouldn't lose to any girl in Therograd, no, any girl in this country in terms of beauty. Maybe we should put you in a dress." He teased.

"And would you court me formally? Take me to all your lavish balls and flaunt me in front of everyone?"

His face reddened. "I would."

It was nothing more than a beautiful dream. I've tasted the sweet nectar of human suffering and I will never value anything higher than that. I have to keep telling myself, he's just a fool I'm playing to get my way. He's just another of my victims.

His face went sour. "It hurts me when you make such a pained expression. I'm sure that forest beast is dealt with by now. My men have trained to take a kingdom, some tribal magician couldn't possibly win."

Was I really making such an expression?

He stood and began to dress. "You should bathe and come to my study. We should be getting a report of our victory shortly."

I threw off the lavish blankets as his eyes devoured me.

"Maybe you would like some company in the baths, I would be happy to wash every inch of you." He said as he looked me over.

I felt myself become aware of my nudity and quickly covered back up. "No, I will be quite alright. You need to leave before anyone knows you stayed here instead of your own chambers last night."

He nodded and strode to the door. He gave me one last lingering look and was gone.

I sat there rubbing my stump. That beast had reduced me to some hopping invalid. Here we had craftsmen who catered to injured knights to make them whole again with wood and metal. Perhaps today I will visit one and request new leg.

I put on a robe and hopped to the hallway gesturing to one of the maids to help me to the baths. Maybe I will use her to make myself feel better. Would he be mad if I forced her to give herself to me while I tortured her?

She shot me a worried smile as she put my arm around her neck and we began our long journey to the baths.

"Hello cutie, what's your name?"

"Bellucia, Your Lordship."

"You realize, Your Lordship, is reserved for nobility of the higher order, right?"

"I'm so sorry, your, uh..."

"Sir Thads."

"Sir?"

I opened my robe to flash her, she turned her head as her face flushed crimson.

She wasn't bad looking, I can see why Andrus kept her around. I was still spent after last night. I guess I will allow her to live another day. Why should I go out of my way to crush every ant in my path. If I did that, I would never be done.

"Yes, Sir. I'm not a knight, but for now that will do."

She helped me to the baths and I slowly lowered myself into their warm clear waters. It still hurt around my stump, though I think a lot of that was in my head. Hearing of that monster's defeat would surely make it better.

I soaked myself in the hot water as I let my mind wonder. The Duke had spoken of my encounter as if I had seen a ghost, but I knew better. If you live by the sword, you die by

it. This pain was my pittance for escaping. That thing was an agent of fate that I couldn't escape.

I couldn't help but to obsess over it. I almost died. Me! How dare it have the gall to harm me.

I waived the maid over. She helped me from the tub and dressed me in finery.

"Take me to The Duke's study."

"Yes your... Sir Thads."

Maybe I will take out some frustration on this peon later. In fact the more I think about it, the more I want to see her bloodstained face as she screams in agony.

As we neared the large doors to Andrus's study I heard a frantic voice and stopped to listen in.

"We were doomed! It left us a warning but we kept going, I knew then, that we should've turned back."

"Have you forgotten your manners! What warning?"

"Begging your pardon Your Grace. We went to the place we was instructed an' all we found there were rows of heads on poles! They were locked in terror as flames shot from their eyes and mouths! I knew they was ours when I saw my sweet cousin's face... Just staring at me, pleading. But Sir Tristus forbade us to touch'em on account of bad magic. I had to leave 'em there, poor Lenny."

"Enough theatrics, get on with it!"

"It had a bloody army Your Grace! They sent me out when the barriers fell, but none met me at the rendezvous. Not a one Your Grace! They's undead, demons a plenty an' giants!"

"Calm yourself soldier. Are you certain you actually saw this? To me this all seems preposterous. Do you say these things to cover your cowardice?"

I entered the room and the soldier jerked his head back. His eyes were crazed with fear and as I looked at him I knew. He had seen the same monster I had, no maybe something even worse.

He wasn't lying.

I steadied myself on the back of a chair and bowed to Andrus. "Your Grace, I believe he tells the truth."

"You both expect me to believe that some feral army of organized monsters sprung up in my own foothills out of nowhere? If I repeated any of this I would become a laughing stock among my peers." He said as he turned and glared out the window.

"Pardon Your Grace, but we must do something. That thing haunts my dreams, I believe it plans to take your Duchy, and with it, my life. I fear it knows where I am, why else would it raise an army." I pleaded.

He slammed his hand down on the table, "no, there's no way I can do any more. I can't call for support. I've lost many good men now, the best I had in fact and if I were to utter a word, either of their passing or of an impending army then I would be beset by my cousins. They would come in the morning, and by nightfall I'd be under the headsman's axe."

He seemed to ponder for a moment, "guards, why don't you take this weary soul to Thad's special chamber to rest his tired bones."

The soldier's eyes grew wide with recognition as he heard my name. He looked me over again. "Thads? No, Thadeus! No! I beg of Your Grace, have mercy!"

Andrus waived his hand to the guard. "This man is a lunatic, get him out of here and ensure he speaks to no one on the way."

The guards dragged the weeping man out of the room and closed the doors behind them.

Andrus looked at me, his unmovable countenance returned to his natural self. "I'm sorry. I don't know what to do anymore."

He plopped down in his chair and held his head in his hands.

I hopped forward and sat in the chair in front of him. I leaned forward and raised his face to meet mine. "It's okay,

you know I'm familiar with your position."

He leaned towards me and spoke. "You'll have to leave soon. I can't risk that thing killing you! I'm sending you north to join the crusade. That should keep you well away from here and hide you from our enemies. I'm not sure I can protect you anymore."

My emotions began to flood me against my will. "No! You've already sent me away once. When this is all over, my enemies will remain and you will have to pay the cost of my sin."

What am I saying!? Why should I give a shit about his fate.

He simply smiled at me. "I would pay that cost a thousand times over, just to see you again. You'll go tomorrow. Tonight, after you've finished that soldier I'll be waiting for you."

"Why? Why do you do all of this for me? You made me your torturer. You let me feel what control was like. You fabricated an assignment for me in the middle of nowhere. Why go to such lengths?" I said, as my anger started to creep up on me.

He gently ran the backside of his hand down the side of my face, "when I met you, you were a lost, discarded boy, but when your eyes looked at me I saw a desperate plea. You were begging me for guidance and your sad beauty made me want to sacrifice the world just to bring a smile to your soft lips. I knew then that I had met the only person I could ever share my burden with. We were both pawns of the king, victims of a flawed system, yet somehow in that moment we found each other."

I glared at him. "All soft, pretty words, but what about our current situation? How does sending me away help you? How are you going to deal with this?"

He removed his hand from my face, "the same way I've dealt with everything so far. Our society is wrong. It's rife with foolish notions and the idiots who maintain them. When

the crusade has gathered enough people, I will march north-east and bypass it. Then, when all the kingdom's forces are here I will besiege my brother's castle and take my rightful place on the throne. Therograd be damned, that creature can have it!"

I started at him in disbelief, "you can't be serious. This is your land, if he takes it, then you lose your position, your fortune, and your claim to the throne."

"If he is actually as strong as you say, then let him spend his resources fighting my cousins for this place as I fight for the throne. If we're lucky they will wipe each other out, or at least become weak enough for me to crush them later. And let's not forget about the crusade. The message said the champion had the ability to conscript people against their will, at least if they were believers of Theressa. If everything plays out as I have envisioned it, then your devil will wipe out our opposition, then the crusade will smash him. In the end the only one with any power will be me and then we can finally reunite. Think about it, we won't have to hide who we are anymore."

"But there will always be decent, especially after a crusade. The last one was more than a thousand years ago and may have been exaggerated, but that champion became a king. If the crusade wins, then they will have the strongest army on our continent and nothing to do with it but pursue it's champion's goals."

"All the more reason to send you. You will sabotage their efforts. I know you're not a believer of Theressa, despite your background. You will be immune to his symbol. Rally his false followers behind his back and spur them to change sides when all is done."

"Someone's going to notice if you and your army depart all at once and, you just lost your best men."

"I'll declare that I'm going to join the crusade myself to make amends with my brother. That fool will be touched by my grand gesture and I won't have any surprises along the

way. I'll also gut the treasury before I go and hire mercenaries in Theross once I arrive. They should still be there since the only gods they worship are silver and gold. It'll also prevent my brother from hiring them to defend himself."

I thought about it, he was making a lot of sense and it would be a great chance for me to bring down more followers of Theressa. Most of my victims were tortured for fun or entertainment, but I've never been able to strike back at the church. If I did this right, I could play a hand in dethroning that son of bitch Barneth. Then I could take my time repaying my debt for his 'lessons.' In a way maybe I should thank him, after all I wouldn't be who I am today if he hadn't shown me the true face of the world.

Wait a minute I have an idea. "You should go straight east as soon as you get north enough to be out of the prying eyes of this city. That way you can cut through former Garanth territories and hire people as you go. I'm sure the champion will avoid these territories because there aren't any real followers of Theressa there. They also have a score to settle with your brother. That way you could arrive at Theross with an army of skilled, motivated warriors. That being said they also seem to be complete idiots. After you've taken the capital you shouldn't have any problems making them your front lines against the crusade and just letting them kill each other. Just throw around words like honor and strength and they will cater to your every whim."

He leaned forward and kissed me. "That's a brilliant idea!"

I pushed him back, "what the void are you doing!? We're in your study, if anyone caught us you would be excommunicated and lose everything and I would probably be executed."

He just smirked at me, "none of that matters anymore. Tomorrow we'll both be leaving this place. I'll put Roswelt in charge here. That should further bolster the belief that I'm



attempting to make amends with my brother. After that, the next time I see you, we won't have to hide our feelings."

"You idiot, what about the church. Just because the majority of them likely joined the crusade doesn't mean that they don't still have followers who would revolt at the mention of our union." I said as I sat back down.

"Don't worry, it pains me to see a frown on that pretty face of yours. The high priest joined the crusade. I should have no problems reinstating the belief in Rosereth and making a few amendments to their doctrine when I select a new high priest."

I began to shake in rage as I struggled to keep my voice down. "Barneth is in the crusade!? You're actually sending me to the same place as that fucker? You know what he did to me, you're the only person I ever told. How can you expect me to see him and not lose my mind."

I could feel my face heating up as tears began to form in my eyes.

He got up and walked around his desk. "You're not some scared boy anymore. Whatever he did to you, you've done worse. You are in control, make him your pawn. Steel yourself and manipulate him. With him in your pocket you should be able to move freely through the camps and even amongst the nobles."

He embraced me and I spoke into his chest. "Maybe so, but at least I killed my victims. His are forced to live with what he did to them, unable to say anything out of fear of excommunication and death. Do you know what that's like, being forced to hide the atrocities of your torturer for them? I've lived with that feeling of hopelessness for every second since he allowed me to leave. The only time I don't feel it is when I'm forcing it upon others or on rare occasion when I'm with you."

He put his hands on either side of my face and forced me to look into his eyes. "Then this is your chance to

orchestrate your revenge. Gather the ones he has hurt and plan his downfall. Make his victims your strength."

I heard a knock at the door.

Andrus quickly sat behind his desk and spoke, "you may enter."

A guard entered and bowed. "Your Grace, the craftsman is here."

"Ah, perfect timing. Thads I have a present for you. Guards, please show him in."

A squat man dressed in strange leathers entered and bowed. "You summoned me yer grace?"

"Indeed, I'll have you carve this man a new leg, and I'll need it done by tomorrow."

"By your will." The man stood and began pulling tools and measuring equipment out of his jacket. He kneeled in front of me and measured my leg then he measured my missing limb. He nodded several times and began writing something in a strange language I hadn't read before. Is he some sort of foreigner?

He put his tools away and before I could ask any questions of him the strange man bowed to Andrus and left, forcing the guards to rush after him.

How am I supposed to deal with all these changes and how can I face Barneth without breaking character. I'll have to play a pious clergyman and bow and scrape to him. It's spitting in the face of every emotion I have. I'll have to throw away Thads and become Thadeus again.

My stomach began to turn and I fought the urge to vomit. I'll have to thank him publicly for his 'tutelage' and pretend to be grateful for what he did to me as I prostrate myself in front of him and kiss his feet.

I've never needed to kill someone more in my life. It's a good thing Andrus got me that soldier. I'm going to use his screams to drive these thoughts out of my mind and as he languishes maybe I can feel something other than dread.

## Chapter 25: Lost - Fura

I opened my eyes and looked around, where am I?

It's dark, I don't like it here. I need the sun, it's warmth comforts me.

I looked up, there's some sort of ceiling here made of roots. Something about this place feels familiar but I don't remember being here before. The smell of fungus was strong and spores hung heavy in the air. When I move my hand along the wall, it feels alive. Small roots and tendrils caress my fingertip as if responding to my touch.

The last thing I remember was a loud boom. My first instinct was to find Leera or John but they were both in the same direction that the sound came from. I remember the kids screaming as their mothers held them, then things got blurry.

How long have I been here? Where is here?

Thanks to John my eyes could see in this dark place as I moved around the room. It lacked any real structure or definite shape, it was only a hollow space.

There doesn't seem to be any openings.

I heard a child's scream from somewhere. Is that one of the gob kids? I hate those little people, all they do is mock me but I still didn't want them to get hurt.

I pressed my ear to the wall and I could make out some of what it was saying. It was John's language. Before him I had never heard that language before, this has to be one of ours.

The screaming grew more urgent and I knew the child was facing something dire. I focused on the wall with all my will. It was alive, and it responded to me. It opened into a new room and inside I saw it.

It was a large beast, nearly dead, yet somehow still standing. The smell of rot was only surpassed by the smell of herbs as puss dripped from it's many wounds. It had holes and lesions all along it's fur and from each sprung a cluster of mushrooms and vines. It's skull was exposed and split, from the gap grew several vines that wiggled and swayed as if searching for something.

The goblin child was against the far wall screaming and trying to scratch his way out. Under the creature was the mauled body of a goblin woman. The creature did not seem interested in eating her, but instead stood over her motionlessly as it's vines moved along her body as if feeling her out.

I madly gestured at the child to try to get him to come this way but he was too panicked to notice me. My breathing was out of control as I fought my urge to run. I wasn't that far from joining the kid in screaming. I edged along the wall slowly towards him as I watched the creature. When I made it halfway to the boy, the creatures head jerked in my direction.

It felt like the blood had frozen in my veins as I brought my hands up to cup my mouth so I wouldn't scream. It opened its mouth wide and began to lurch down in quick motions. As it moved, it began gagging and heaving. Several vines began to appear around it's bloodied mouth and started squirming and writhing as if trying to escape.

The creature's head split open and with a gurgling noise a large bulbous creature plopped out onto the goblin woman's body. The creature fell over dead and the child stopped screaming as he looked on in horror. The vines attached to the strange bulb began to enter the woman through her wounds and mouth. The bulb split into several smaller parts as the vines wriggled their way into her body.

I ran to the child who in his fright struck out at me knocking me to the ground. There was a low moan coming from behind me and I didn't want to stick around to see

what it was. I grabbed the child and opened the wall in front of us. We tumbled through and I quickly closed the opening I had made.

The child struck at me like a feral beast clawing me and screeching. I hugged him close to try to calm him. "Plant lady?"

"Fura." I replied as he began to sob uncontrollably.

I looked around the room. In the middle lay two more people and a some scattered bags. I used life sense and saw that they were still alive.

I hugged the child close and began to shush him. "It alright now. That thing is not here."

The child still cried but now he had quietened down a bit. "...My mother, it killed her."

I began rocking him back and forth like I saw Leera do to Rosie. I didn't understand the gesture, but it seemed to work.

His cries became sniffles as he noticed the three people who shared a room with us.

He crawled over to them and began shaking them making those weird noises that goblins make when talking to each other. I understood some Goblin and knew he was calling to them.

After a while one of them groaned and began to stir. It was a young female, she looked around the room in confusion as the boy began speaking to her at a mile a minute not waiting for her to process anything.

"Shhh! You need quietness. There is other thing here." I warned.

I understood John's language, but I haven't mastered it yet. When he shares himself with me I learn more, but my body also changes. At first I was fine with only eating leafy vegetables but now I craved meat. I was used to my body changing, it changed with each new visitor to my tree. I had always been able to read some of my food's feelings, their

language, their sexual preferences and of course how to act to entice them.

Undead things were the only exception. Before I knew what they were, I tried to tempt one. I let it get too close and it actually bit me. That was the first time I was terrified in my life but this is much worse. I've seen many things, but never anything like what I saw in that room behind us.

There was a low moaning sound and everyone froze.

The wall I was leaning on opened and I fell back. Hands grabbed me and held me down in a deathgrip. When I looked up, all I saw were glossy eyes staring back at me lifelessly. The goblin woman opened her mouth and her vines began to force their way into my mouth but stopped. The woman suddenly released me as her head turned at an unnatural angle to face the other four in the room.

The boy shrieked incoherently as he ran and kicked her in the face knocking her back into the other room.

I quickly sat up and sealed the wall behind me.

The boy began sobbing again. "I'm sorry mom! I'm so sorry..."

"We need to go!" I yelled as I began grabbing the bags. The boy ran back and helped the girl up. They both began dragging the unconscious one to the far wall.

I opened the wall and the kids ambled through as quickly as they could.

As I followed them I scanned the new room, it was empty.

Behind me the moans grew louder as I sealed the wall behind us.

I panicked and shoved the kids forward. "We need speed! Keep going to new rooms!"

They ran to the far wall and I opened it only to find it was concealing an earthen wall.

"Not this one, go there!" We tried the wall beside of us, again it was made of tightly packed soil.

The wall behind us opened and the shambling creature entered. It stood there as if evaluating us before it pointed

to me.

We all stood there paralyzed by dread. Now there was no escape.

It's vines retreated back inside it's mouth and it began hacking up blood as if trying to clear its throat.

It spoke in forestkin, "Why have you returned as an abomination!" It's voice was choked and harsh despite the beauty of the language it spoke.

"You dare call one as perfect as me an abomination!" I yelled, trying to hide the fear in my voice.

It coughed another gob of blood onto the ground. "You were perfect once my child but now something has corrupted you! Why have you returned as this... thing?"

"Me, a thing? I don't understand what you're trying to say."

"I don't wish to kill one of my children but you defile my womb!" She held her hands up and emitted a strained screech. "No, perhaps you can still be of use." The vines on the wall sprang out at the creature's command and latched onto us, ripping us back and slamming us into the hard earthen surface behind them. "I'll have you carry your brothers and sisters into the world. Find them a good host!"

As I struggled, the vines gripped tighter, pulling me in and binding me in place. After a time, I heard screaming and I knew it was the small gob girl. She choked and gagged and soon her yelling stopped only to be followed by the boys.

"Leave him alone!"

I didn't like the boy, but I knew him. He teased me and I chased him. In a way we had become friends, and now he will die while looking into his dead mother's face.

His pleading turned to gagging and it was quiet again.

"Damn you!"

I listened as the fleshy noises continued followed by more gagging. She was probably doing the same thing to the unconscious one.

I heard a slow shambling as her ghastly face came into view. Her mouth was filled bloody roots. "Don't worry child, mommy will fix you."



## Chapter 26: Emergency - Threscia

A lot has happened since yesterday and neither John nor Mors have responded to me.

After the battle, there was confusion.

"Who are you!?" The red oni roared as he looked at me.

"Chill, big poppa, I don't know if you can tell by all the enemy blood that I'm wearing, but I'm on your side."

I raised my fist in the air and shot my bone spear.

This body just isn't right. My arms are way too mismatched. I used John's arm for my right, and kept the size so I could use his Bone spear, but now I feel wonky.

It's fine with me if it hangs out a foot or so. I used fleshcrafting and matched my arms the best I could. I wasn't Mors and didn't have a perfect sense of symmetry but this felt okay.

We spent the next few hours killing the surviving enemies and gathering the bodies of our fallen.

Leera and I worked together to heal the wounded until one of Athen's men came running up to us with a worried expression.

"Mistress Leera! Your group is gone, at first we thought they took shelter in the woods, but we haven't been able to find any traces of them, not even tracks."

I began shaking the goblin, "where is Roscia! Where's my sister!?"

He looked at Leera with a desperate expression.

Leera closed her eyes and finished healing the goblin in front of her.

She spoke with a calm confidence. "Gather everyone who can walk and form a circle, from there fan out straight and keep your eyes peeled. It's night now, and I'm well aware of the dangers so command everyone to use their Life Sense

and move as cautiously as possible. If they encounter anything at all, they should retreat rather than engaging."

The goblin weaseled out of my grip and ran off to gather the rest. I chased after him but was stopped by Ralphus.

"Ah, Girl-John, over here!"

"Not now Ralph, I need to find my sister!"

"Running in random directions won't help her, but I can help you." The Necromancer waved me to follow him as he walked off towards where the supplies used to be.

There was just one thing left there as if abandoned. It was a large black box with glowing chains, I vaguely remember it from when he gave it to John.

"Look here, everything is gone except this one box, and I think I know why." He opened up the box and pulled out a small chest. "In here are the-"

"Yeah, your creepy nightmare bugs that you killed John with that one time."

He cleared his throat. "Yes, those."

I'm starting to feel annoyed with this guy. "What's your point, I need to go!"

"I saw you fleshcrafting yourself and whatever took them was afraid of this box. The only things that comes to mind are the glowing chains or these, unless it doesn't care for classic magical literature."

I stared at him for a few moments.

"I guess this isn't the time for jokes. Alright here's the plan, though I hate to see them used rather than letting them propagate. Take the queen, she's this chubby one here with the fleshy tail."

"I'm not John, if I die, that's it until John gets back. I can't afford to do that now with my sister missing."

He squeezed the bridge of his nose and sighed. "I'll get it for you, but let's go over the plan first. I'll pull her out, I know how to grab them. What you need to do is to fleshcraft this queen onto yourself and copy her pheromones. After you do that the others will no longer strike at you. Then take

them and make a space for them somewhere. If you do that, then you will have a weapon against whatever did this."

I thought about it for a moment... They are kind of cute when the firelight shines off their beady little eyes and they have those two pointy little stingers on their fangs. "If I remember right, then those things have a painful sting huh. And they also are instant death to anyone who is stung." I think I've found my weapon. "Alright, I'm in. Grab Queeny for me."

He reached in carefully, then withdrew his hand with a yelp.

"Shit! Are you-"

"Heh"

I ejected my bone spear and glared at him. "You son of bitch, now's not the time!"

There was a whisper in my ear which put a shiver down my spine. "Oh, and what are you planning on doing with that, sweetie?"

Ralphus's eyes grew wide as he spoke in a rush. "Lang, it's okay, she's right to be mad. It was a poor decision on my part, It's just that I can never resist pulling that prank."

I slowly turned my head and wished I hadn't as Languoria's bloodshot eyes met mine with only a few inches between us.

I jumped away. "Damn, and I thought Liz was bad. Be careful with this one or you may end up tied up in a cellar."

Ralphus smiled at me. "That's the idea."

Languoria smiled at him and moved to plaster herself to his side.

"A little space please dear, I don't want you to become a zombie again if you cause me to drop the queen."

He reached in and pinned the queen down before lifting her by the sides as she hissed and struck air, flinging venom on the ground in front of her.

"Come around to my side, don't walk in front of her, and don't breath in too deeply."

I gave the bug a wide berth as I circled around to look at it over his shoulder.

"You can touch her back all you want, but don't get too close to her head or she'll nick you, and that's all it takes."

I nervously moved my finger towards her. You know, in the right light she's actually kinda majestic.

As soon as my finger touched her, she arched her back and tried to strike me with her massive fangs.

I used fleshcrafting to merge my finger with her.

"Ooh, I feel something different."

Ability Gained: Insect Pheromones

Ability Gained: Acidic Venom

Ability Gained: Chitin

Ability Gained: Hive Mind

"Mors!?"

"Yes?"

"When did you get back and where's John? I need him now, Roscia's missing."

"He's asleep, I believe it may take him a little while longer to awaken again. Would you like to see your new abilities?"

"I guess I should if I need to use them."

Insect Pheromones:

Pheromones are a common method of communication between insects. They tell of where they have been and what species they are. An insect will usually not attack a friendly insect of the same species. They also show status and how an insect should treat another insect.

Example: The queen's pheromones will force drones of the same species to protect her.

Acidic Venom:

The queen uses multi-chambered fangs that render a concoction of several different active agents. Each queen's venom is unique and based upon their early diets. The

acidic properties are weak and have mostly a hydrogen fluoride base along with her normal bacterial based venom and peptide toxins. A unique aspect of this species is that they also carry over their parent's toxins and grow a new additional toxin chamber with each generation of queen.

Effects: Very high chance of instant death, but if by miracle they live they will experience: Abnormal heartbeat, tissue damage, salivation, cardiac arrest, tremors, muscle tenseness, opisthotonus, systemic toxicity, the rupturing of blood cells, necrosis and respiratory failure.

I don't really understand this, but I think I'm in love. I'm going to give that blonde bastard a taste of this when I see him.

"Ralphus, what'd you feed this thing?"

"Every now and then the apprentices or neophytes will bring in something they claim is a new and improved form of amber to try to scam me. I ground that stuff into powder and sprinkled it on their food... Which happened to be the ones who tried to scam me."

"Why'd you do that?"

"I get bored."

I shook my head at him, well whatever works.

"Please continue Mors."

Chitin:

This is a form of semi-hard carapace that occurs naturally among most arthropods. It is used as a natural defense. This variety seems to value speed and flexion above hardness.

Yep, I'm making that as soon as I can.

"Mors, what do I need to make chitin?"

"I'm not sure you're going to like this. You will need to eat several insects and fibrous plants. I would recommend going the insect route as fleshcrafting should make the change quickly. Plants however would first have to be digested and

converted in your body, then moved to desired places, which could take months or years for any real result."

"Damn, please continue."

Hive Mind:

The queen may assign rules to her colony with the use of pheromones. As the rules she assigns start to stack the overall behavior of the colony is changed and rudimentary intelligence is formed.

Example: You issue an order to prioritize capturing locusts for a food source. The colony may pass by several other viable sources to bring back locusts only, leading to a lack of food. You then add a rule and it becomes. Prioritize locusts as a food source ,if, you encounter them.

I focused and used fleshcrafting to absorb the queen. There can be only one.

I used Hive Mind.

'Don't bite anyone ,unless, I say otherwise.'

I reached my hand inside the chest.

"Woah, don't-" Ralphus squeaked out.

"Ahh!" I screamed and yanked my hand back.

"By the Void, are you-"

"Ha"

Ralphus let out a hardy laugh.

Before I went through John's memories, I had no concept of a dad joke, but Ralphus seems to be the embodiment of one. Somehow this makes me sad. My father never made jokes. No one did, maybe someday I can share this with Roscia and see her laugh like this.

I reached my hand back into the box and used Hive Mind again.

My cute little minions crawled up my arm and nestled on my shoulder.

I looked at Ralphus. "Thanks, I'm sorry I was rude earlier, but my sister is all I have and I want to find her as soon as I can."

"Take one of the heads with you. If something did take them, it's safe to say it had a fear of necromancy. Lang and I will join your search, after all my main pupil is among the missing."

"Your pupil?"

I scanned through John's memories, "Lil'sis is missing too?"

I hadn't stopped to consider who all was part of Leera's group. John is going to go on another rampage isn't he.

I felt a cold embrace and I got the feeling that something horrible lay before me.

I felt a glimpse of fury. Rage at the subversion of will. I felt something wet pouring from my eyes. Black!? These are John's tears.

The embrace tightened. My followers?

The dark god is warning me. It's saying his followers are crying out for him. I need to get going!

"Mors, even me out, I suck at fleshcrafting. Also Make me fangs and add injectors to my Bone spear."

"I can even you out and add acidic venom to your bone spear, but if you add it to your fangs you will die when you use it. Even if your body can produce it, it doesn't free you from the effects. This is an ability, not magic."

"Nevermind the fangs then, just hurry, I've spent too much time already."

"As you wish."

I felt my body changing and shifting, and soon she was done.

"You seem oddly okay with letting me boss you around. I thought you only served John."

"That's because it's for Master's good as well. His daughters are missing and he is currently helpless. I do have one request before you go. Please take Master's core to Leera. He will need a body and Leera knows what to do."

I sighed as I clenched my teeth, "I don't have time for this!"

"Don't forget, you gave yourself to him, and he won't be able to help you this way! Just pray to him once you find them and we will hopefully be recovered enough to come."

"Fine."

I sprinted back to Leera with all my strength.

She looked at me with a raised eyebrow as I lifted my chain-mail and pulled out John's core.

"Mors said you knew what to do with this, I've got to go!"

With that, I sped off to get the search under way.



## Chapter 27: Merging - John

Ah, everything still hurts. Resurrection spells suck!

Mors appeared in front of me and curtsied with a slight blush. "Welcome back Master!"

Ability Gained: Insect Pheromones

Ability Gained: Acidic Venom

Ability Gained: Chitin

Ability Gained: Hive Mind

Well isn't that interesting, oh. If only there was pain reliever in this world.

"Use the calming effect, but please only once this time."

Calming Effect.

I guess I feel a little better, so new abilities?

"Yes, Threscia merged with the queen of those nightmare bugs. You should be able to go over your memories to see what happened."

I can't make use of those abilities just yet, so let's just figure out where we are and what's happening.

Ahh! Fuck! My daughters, my followers and even Fura are calling for me. Most are scared but Fura is suffering. No there are many that are already dead...

I'm in something dead and huge, a horse?

"Mors, restore my normal form. I'll be making modifications after I can see my available materials."

Gradually the world came into view again and I was greeted by the cool night air on my skin.

I stood and looked around.

Mors was low. Goblins were crying and even Red looked depressed as he gazed at Blue's body.

It looks like they lined up men by the dead gobs.

"Let's get to work."

"Yes Master!"

I activated Soul Steal and gathered all the souls friend and foe alike.

Though these men had attacked and killed us, they hadn't committed any atrocities. They would not become torches. But, what to do with them?

I felt a bit bad about the whole hand puppet thing, but they had attacked Lina. The smallest and sweetest of us, I wonder if Leera ever told her about what happened.

No, I can't be distracted right now.

The goblins were looking at me with hope in their eyes, let's focus on bringing everyone back first.

The majority of the dead and injured where my group. The rest where from the phalanx and two from the ranged. Where is Athen?

From this I can tell that my group though more than willing to charge in still lacks power.

"Mors, bring up the enemies spells, skills and a list of matching affinities among my group."

Spells:

Wind Blade: Lvl. 1 x2

Wind Barrier: Lvl. 4 x2

Enhance Weapon (Wind): Lvl. 5

Wall of Fire: Lvl. 3

Fireball: Lvl. 4

Fire Barrier: Lvl. 5

Enhance Weapon (Fire): Lvl. 6

Ice Arrow: Lvl. 5

Wall of Ice: Lvl. 3

Ice Barrier: Lvl. 6

Enhance Weapon (Ice): Lvl. 5

Heal: Lvl. 1

Heal: Lvl 6

Resurrection (Light): Lvl. 1

Resurrection (Light): Lvl. 5  
Resurrect All (Light): Lvl. 1  
Light Barrier: Lvl. 5  
Enhance Weapon (Light): Lvl. 1  
Enhance Weapon (Light): Lvl. 5

Non-Affinity Spells:

Magic Barrier: Lvl. 3 x3  
Mana Transfer: Lvl. 4 x3  
Mana Transfer: Lvl. 1 x2  
Mana Transfer: Lvl. 6  
Mana Arrow: Lvl. 1 x3  
Magic Weapon: Lvl. 3 x3  
Magic Weapon: Lvl. 6

So that's how they were able to keep up that huge barrier, they used a spell to transfer mana. No wonder Athen's group made short work of them once the barrier dropped. They were all probably drained. Excluding the two healer types, I noticed their light elementalists rather than clergy. It's similar to Leera.

"Okay Mors, compatible affinities please."

Affinities:

Berserkers: x7  
Fire x3  
Wind x1  
Infernal x2

Ranged: x2  
Wind x2

Phalanx: x5  
Wind x1  
Fire x1

Athen's Group: x3  
N/A

"Woah, why's infernal in that list?"

"Infernal is compatible with fire and darkness. Also I didn't list it, but everyone has a high dark affinity and can use the non-affinity spells."

"Interesting, I'm taking the Mana Transfer Lvl. 6. Give the Wind Blades, Mana Transfers, Mana Arrows and one of the Magic Barriers to the Ranged. Give one of the Wind Barriers, the Wall of Fire and the Fire Barrier to the Phalanx. And my Berserkers get the Enhance Weapon (fire), the Enhance Weapon (Wind) and the rest of the Magic Weapon spells. I'm assuming the infernal ones are Bob, I'll give him fireball. I'm still stuck with several spells here, so I guess I'll be taking volunteers for the rest."

"Yes Master."

Now on to this split Bob thing and Carol. I've been avoiding opening my soul screen, but I've got to face it.

I opened the soul screen.

Soul of a Crazy Warlock: 11%

Soul of a Loyal Sex Fiend: 82%

Fragment of Chaos: 0.0001%

Soul of Caroline: 100%

Soul of a Pledged Follower: 100%

Soul of Sir Tristus: 100%

Soul of Yurich: 100%

Soul of an Aged Healer: 100%

Soul of a Battlemage: 100% x8

Soul of a Heavy Cavalryman: 100% x16

Soul of a scout: 100%

Soul of an Infiltrator: 100% x2

Soul of a Trained Warhorse: 100% x31

She really is there... I killed her. I stole the life from someone who didn't deserve to die. This is the second time in my life that I truly felt like a murderer.

I had to resist the urge to use the calming effect again.

Whereas Sid was always a dick, she was actually nice to me. I always felt bad for her and her situation. If I were truly in my right mind back there I don't believe I would have ever killed her. But I'm back here now, and I'm staring the evidence of my crime right in the face.

I'm going to put this off and talk to my friend first. Having Bob back would make things easier, as fucked up as he is, he really is a good friend. But why are there two of him? Soul of a Crazy Warlock? That's what Bob originally appeared as, before I named him. I figured Bob might have a few personalities floating around in that mind of his, but not on the soul level. And what is this Fragment of Chaos? It seems like some overused fantasy term. It sounds like a cliché fantasy key item that I would have to keep in my inventory for half a game.

I opened up Soul of a Crazy Warlock.

A static image was in front of me. It shifted and blurred constantly, only keeping the barest semblance of human form.

As I looked at it, it smiled and bowed that oddly refined bow Bob does from time to time.

How can it have any degree of cognitive thought at only 11%?

"Are you Bob?"

"I ...ow ...ot this ...ob," it answered in Therossian.

Pretty sure that's what he said when I named him. I have an idea here.

"I'll be back, pardon me for a moment."

I exited as it bowed to me once more.

I opened Soul of a Loyal Sex Fiend.

"Boss!"

"Bob!"

"Boss!"

"Bo- Dammit, now's not the time. Why're there two of you, and what was up with that form you came to me in, in the forest?"

"Sorry Boss, things are a little fuzzy, not those things, but those're fuzzy too." He said as he gestured to his crotch.

Yep, this is Bob alright.

"I'm going to open up another soul window, hopefully you won't implode or cause some sort of anomaly."

I brought the crazed warlock into the same window as Bob.

"Ah, ...oung one, I see, ...ou di.. it. He ...ived."

"Mors, how can he possibly have this level of awareness and speech?"

Mors appeared and curtsied.

Bob devoured Mors with his eyes. "Ah, there she is, and look at that glow and not just the green one. There's something different about ya. So Boss, can you clean up spectral jizz, or did she just take it all?"

I coughed and Mors's usually pale skin turned a deep shade of red.

"Ahh, I knew it!" Bob looked back and forth from my crotch to Mors. "You've put that thing in some petite ladies before but this one. Did it come out her mouth, it's bigger than her whole body. She had to have been like an undersized flesh-light to ya." Both Bobs laughed.

God damned Book-Fairy, Bob knows way too much about my life and my world.

Mors erupted in a green light and Bob was slammed against a wall formed in the darkness. "I am death here and I will not be trifled with! I come for all, strong, weak, poor, rich and fools like you."

Bob struggled to draw in breath as spoke. "Well, I know at least one person you came for!"

The other Bob began laughing but shut up as Mors turned her gaze towards him.

She sighed as the green light around her diminished and Bob fell to the ground like a discarded rag-doll.

I just looked on in amazement. I've never seen how Mors deals with souls that don't listen to her, but she's quite the little badass.

She looked back towards me and bowed. "Sorry Master, I didn't want you to see that way. On to your question. Bob, seems to be an anomaly, he always has been. I don't have any good reason as to how this is possible."

Bob got up and walked over to himself. "Hello me, it's me again. Ya may not remember it now, but this guy saved us. Though maybe not you, or me, as you?"

"I ...remember him. He ...ied, and wi... ...im the ...orld."

I have an idea that might fill in the gaps for him. If I merge a blank slate soul into him maybe he will stabilize.

My mind jerked back to the girls I wasn't able to save. Why the hell didn't I think of this earlier...

"It's okay Master, they were too far gone for this to work for them. Even though you combined them to twelve percent, they were only a random scattering of memories."

I've made up my mind.

"Mors, strip one of the enemy souls of all memory, personality and skills. Then merge it with him and teach him English."

"Master... He already knows it."

The shuddering stopped, and in front of me was an old man. "Ah, thank you John. Now where was I. Ah yes, things were different when I last lived. I don't remember it all clearly, but this version of you never existed for me, he was different. We were never friends, and he left my burning memories intact. He restored me as a small flying creature and left me in a cave to repopulate with an unwilling Dipshit. After some time, me and my race of little creatures followed him to the goblin village where he massacred them until they submitted. After that he killed the bandits and converted them to zombies. There was no Leera, no Lina, no

Nex or Liz. He lived only to collect souls for his master, the god of souls. He succumbed to an ambush and when he died, the world was washed away with darkness as everything died with him."

A chill ran up my spine, that definitely could have happened if I never won against the book fairy. When I think back, could I have won if it wasn't for the dark god's help? In that critical moment when I confronted her and we were in a power struggle, what if he didn't aid me to consume her.

I probably would have consumed Lina and Leera's souls and went out recklessly seeking others following her stupid quests. I would have been weaker, without her mana and the allies I have. And without my mates I probably would have continued to treat this world like a fantasy world. Goblins would have just been a fodder creature and bandits would have just been another low level mob to gain Exp off of as I followed her made up level-up scheme. I would have been weak, dumb and lonely.

"How do you know all of this?"

"The dark god was my god, before he was yours. He sustains me even now when I'm at a loss, and shares with me all your memories. Though he was still a part of you then, he didn't help you. Maybe this time he wanted to see a different outcome. But if I had to guess I would say that there's something different about this you than the last one."

"How so?"

"I don't know, but this is the suicide plane, and you don't seem to belong this time. Last time you had no hope or sympathy but this time you seem to care a little more."

"The suicide plane?"

"Yes, the place where the Dark God has the most influence. When beings from the other planes commit suicide they end up here. Even the world itself has a self destructive streak. I've seen it's end many times, through many lives."



Bob chimed in, "wow, other me is a real downer."

I ignored Bob and continued speaking with... other Bob?  
"How do you know so much about planes and such?"

"I had a spell, one of the last I used in fact that restored a few memories from past lives. I thought it would provide me with lost magics, but instead it only gave me more questions. I remember you, the you before you were here. You were the fat guy who would interrupt my coitus by banging on the wall. Dammit, does no one understand the masterworks of the ultimate instrument, performed by perhaps the most underrated musician of the twentieth century." He winked at me.

Oh my god.

He transformed from an old man into my short hairy neighbor, complete with gold chains and a wife beater.

"Ew, that's what you were doing over there?! I somehow thought you were doing jumping jacks or something."

"If you want to call my stepdaughter jumping jacks then you'd be right chief. And what was up with you playing goodbye horses every morning, not that I didn't appreciate it. You had to know what mental picture that gave me. I always thought you were rubbing and tucking."

"Only a few times... I mean, nevermind that. Sometimes I played HEYYEYAAEYAAAEYAEYAA or maybe Tralala."

"Yeah, followed by cannibal corpse. Ha, we shoulda been friends." He said as he looked at my Bob. "But I guess in way, we are now."

"Why are you so different from my Bob and how did you end up here, what happened over there after my death?"

"Woah, woah there Boss, That's allot a questions all at once. Burning for more than thirty years kinda killed my sense of humor. You saved this me from having to deal with that but in so doing, cost him the memories of his previous life. As for how I ended up here, I always thought I would go out like Crowley or Nietzsche, but I heard a loud bang from downstairs and poof, I was a witch's baby."

"And after my death?"

"Not much really, though I still remember laughing my ass off as angry police carried off one traumatized sex doll after another from your apartment. I looked through your window later and saw white outlines around the room, I'm guessing that at first they thought they were your victims."

Oh, shit, well I suppose that was to be expected. I can only guess how I'm remembered now. ...Crap, I think I left everything to my ex-wife. Well honey, I hope you like receiving a bunch of dolls and lube. That must have been great news after learning I was a killer.

"Did they at least play A Tout Le Monde at my funeral?"

"Nope, they played Barbie Girl."

I used the calming effect.

Yep, she got a bunch of dolls and lube.

"Well, thank you for going to my funeral at least."

"No prob Boss, I didn't really think ya did it. You were always so quiet and unassuming."

Awesome, I was one of those. Now it really does sound like I did it.

"I did, or at least I think I did. Though honestly it doesn't feel right to say it."

I sighed. What am I going to do with these two? "What do the two of you want to do about this situation? Do you both want new bodies, or do you want to merge?"

My Bob looked at alt Bob and shrugged. "It's fine with me."

Alt Bob scratched his brow for a moment. "Well, I've always been full of myself, except when I'm filling someone else."

Bob laughed, "You can fill me anytime big boy!"

"Okay, this is as much Bobbness as I can take for now. If you two are ready, I'll go ahead and combine you. But before I do, do either of you know why I have a fragment of chaos, or what it's used for?"

Alt Bob's eyes shined as my Bob gave a wry grin. "You'll find out someday, though probably not for a very long time. In the meantime, ya should merge that with us. It's the reason we're still here, and not just scattered mana."

I nodded and closed out of the soul screen.

I merged both Bobs and the fragment of chaos then opened Bob's soul.

Before me stood the same old Bob that I knew in his now familiar demonic sha'dwarg form.

"Hey ya, Boss, all's well here. Just a bit more burnin' than I remember before, but I got some new tricks."

Bob sat back on his haunches and in his beastly hands appeared a tiny ukulele.

"Now's not the time, the girls are in danger."

The instrument disappeared and a grimace spread across his face as his eyes glowed red. "No one hurts the girls..."

I decided to put off my imminent conversation with Caroline for now. As I closed the soul window.

I then sat about restoring my men, using the same pattern as last time. I transferred the skills of the man next to them directly into them as I merged and blended their bodies.

In a way my army is different than most. The more we die the stronger we get. At this rate my group will be the strongest simply by dying the most often. But it would be strength put to good use. If your going to be shock troops, then you have to be the strongest.

## Chapter 28: Struggle - Lil'sis

I woke up some time ago in this weird, dark place.

For some reason, I seem to have lost all my amber. Weird noises came from all around me. Voices full of pain, some growling, some screaming and some gagging.

Without my amber there's nothing I can do, and no openings I can go through.

I sat down and focused on John as I did earlier in my dream. He came for me then, I'm sure he will come for me now.

The screaming had grown close and I began to worry about my sister. Is she also stuck somewhere here? Are some of those screams her's?

My fear became palpable as things grew quiet.

The wall in front of me split open and a fetid wolf stared at me with glossy eyes.

I stood and readied myself to attack it. I'm not going to die!

It took a single step, then began vomiting small snake-like things. They slithered along the ground briefly before spasming and curling in on themselves.

My mouth was dry and my heart was pounding as I fought my revulsion and I charged the beast and kicked it, but it just fell over, and stopped moving.

When I looked at it more closely, this thing was definitely sick, maybe even dead. I edged past it into the next room. I didn't know what was in there, but I knew it was better than staying where I was and awaiting death.

There was a person laying in this room.

"Wendy? Wendy! Wake up!"

I shook her, she seemed to be okay, but she was still knocked out. There were a bunch more of those snake

thingies dead all around her. I don't know what killed them, but at least she was still breathing.

I stared nervously at them, they had thorns and a weird bulb for a head. They looked like someone dug up a plant and gave it teeth. I moved my hand slowly towards one and it jerked at me.

I pulled my arm back. I need some sort of defense against this shit. I'm not using my dagger, I don't want to get that close.

What was it Ralpus was saying? He told me so much all at once that it's hard to put it all together. I remember the chants for the whip, and the chants for the ball, but there was something else. Something about what to do if I'm out of amber.

He said I can create a soul prison out of something dead. I looked back at the dead wolf, it's mouth began dissolving into a frothy red sludge.

Nope, I am not touching that.

I returned to Wendy and began dragging her away from the rest of those shriveled up snake things.

Wendy began choking and gagging, then swallowed hard. I sat her up and began patting her on the back as her eyes slowly opened.

"Lil'sis? Where are we?" She said in a hoarse voice.

"Use your Night Sight, we're in a hole."

She looked around the room, and noticed the rotting wolf. "Ew, what's that?"

"Some kind of stinky, snake filled, wolf-thing."

I've seen enough shit now that nothing surprises me anymore. That's not to say it wasn't freaky though.

Wendy gagged, "that's gross!"

She tried to stand but began coughing.

"Woah, easy there. Rest for a while, I don't think we're going anywhere for now, there's no doors."

We sat there for a while in silence as I thought of ways we might could get out. I took out my dagger and began to

dig. Whenever I would make a gouge, the ground would somehow seal back up. It's strange, once you get passed the top layer it's fleshy.

Wendy saw what I was doing and tried doing the same thing with her dagger, but had the same result. "This ground is weird."

"Let's try the wall."

We both got up and began stabbing the wall. It felt like trying to stab a tree through a wooden cage. "Crap... I know what this is."

Wendy cocked her head, "what?"

"We're prisoners and this is some sort of magic cage."

"Fuck!" Wendy yelled in a cute voice.

I leaned against the wall and slowly slid down it. "...Yep"

Ow, that was stupid, one of those thorny vines stuck me.

"Be careful of the-"

"Ow!"

"Yeah, those."

I felt the roots behind me begin to squirm and I jumped up to look at them.

Slowly with a shrill hissing noise the roots began to wither and pull away from Wendy like living things.

Wendy raised her eyebrows and watched as she sucked her finger. Where she had been pricked her dagger fell away from the wall making a clanging noise as the vines shriveled and released it.

"Wendy! Spit on it!"

"Ew, why!?"

"Please, just do it!"

She began making a hacking noise.

"That's disgusting, do it normally."

"Ish too rate, I aredy harted."

I covered my ears as she spit a pink loogie onto the wall. I should have covered my eyes instead.

In the places where it splattered, the wall began to deteriorate as the hissing returned.

"It's working, keep doing it!"

She began hawking again. "Noo! why can't you spit like everyone else?"

"Tish ish how I shpit."

I heaved, "don't talk with that in your mouth."

She spit again, this time I covered my eyes. It wasn't any better. When I think about it, I guess I could just cover my ears and close my eyes but I didn't want to be caught without any warning.

She stopped and looked at me. "Why aren't you helping?"

I pointed to my blood on the vines. "Because, mine doesn't work."

She shrugged and began hawking again.

"You're doing this on purpose aren't you?"

She smiled at me. "Hoink wha?"

I gagged and she began laughing.

"Oops..."

"What!?"

"I swallowed it."

I tasted my lunch in the back of my throat before I painted the floor with it.

She was cackling now.

"That's it, I'm going to go hang out with the dead wolf thing, it's less gross than you!"

I looked at the wolf's face as it slowly melted in on itself, turning into a red paste. Somehow this really is less gross than what she's doing over there. Too bad I can still hear her.

Wait a minute.

I dipped the tip of my dagger into the red stuff, and touched it to the wall. It began shrinking away just like the places she was spitting.

I coated the rest of my blade in it and began slinging it onto the wall she was working on. Together we were finally able to make a hole big enough to walk through. We ducked

and walked into the new room as the wall continued to hiss behind us.

There was a goblin girl laying in the middle of the room. I took a step towards her but stopped as I heard a loud scream, followed by gagging coming from the wall across from us.

"Quick, let's go back to the other room!" I whispered.

Wendy shook her head and ran towards the girl. "We have to help her. What if John just left us dead, or Bob didn't save us!"

"Dammit!" I ran towards the woman and we both dragged her back into the last room. She seemed light, I keep forgetting how strong we are now.

We crawled back through the hole and leaned the girl against the wall.

The wall split and a rotten bear walked in. It looked around slowly before disappearing through another wall.

It looks like these diseased animals have free run of this place.

Wendy whispered to me from beside the girl, "What's happening here?"

I shrugged at her. "I have no idea."

Sounds of roaring and pounding came from the wall the bear had just walked through. The wall opened again and the bear came stumbling out and crashed on the floor. A tentacle shot out behind it and dragged it back as it frantically clawed for a foothold. There was a loud smack followed by several thuds and a splat, then the walls of the room were covered in gore.

We watched with wide eyes as I saw my sister's cheerful face peek out from the open wall.

I crawled back into the room, "Belairia!"

She wiped the blood from her face and locked me in a vice-like hug.

"Yay! but ew." I'm now covered in... Are these intestines?



She smiled at me, "I'm so happy you're okay! Do you know where we are?"

"No, and I lost my amber somewhere."

"You mean that glowy green rock?"

"Yeah, did you find it?"

"Nope, sorry."

I looked over at the bloody sludge that used to be a bear. Most of its head still seemed to be in tact and I was already covered in the rest of it. I may as well make a soul prison out of it.

I walked over to the head and picked it up. One of those little snakevines crawled from it's eye socket and struck at me.

I dropped the head and jumped back.

"I got ya sis." Belairia stepped on the creature with a crunch. "Why are you picking that up anyway?"

"You'll see, just keep guard."

I began chanting, but nothing was happening. What am I forgetting?

Wendy crawled into the room, and sis hugged her.

"I... Can't... Breath..."

"Oh, sorry, you're just so damn cute with your little outfit."

"Eww, you got guts on me!"

Wendy led sis to go get the girl we saved earlier.

Let's try this again. I chanted the same two more times, but still nothing happened.

Dammit, I guess I do have to be touching it. I leaned down and placed my hand on it. It was cold and wet with blood. I also had to watch out for more of those snake thingies.

When I chanted this time the head started to glow green and as I got to the last line it's eyes exploded in green flames and I could hear squealing coming from inside the skull.

It looks like I was successful, and I got a few of those snakes too as a bonus. The problem now is that I have to carry this wonky thing around to use my spells.

I tucked the head under my left arm and chanted for the bound soul whip. "Ligatus anima mea, flagelli. Ralphus magnus est!"

The green cord appeared in my hand and I slashed it at the wall in front of me. The vines fell in a writhing mass on the floor and I could see through to the other side. I continued whipping through it until I had a doorway. But as soon as it looked like I could crawl through, it began to close itself back off again.

I slashed at it with my whip a few more times, "Everybody hurry, we need to get through before it closes!"

They walked into the room and looked at my work.

"Show off!" Wendy said as she crawled through.

I stuck out my tongue, "it beats loogeing it to death."

Wendy reached her hands back through and gave the gimme gimme gesture as Sis passed the girl to her and she pulled her through.

Sis hugged me, "Ooh, you grew up so fast!"

"Stop! You're still covered in guts."

She crawled through and I followed last.

We made our way through several empty rooms until I felt sis's arm against my chest. "Shh, there's something in here."

We heard the sounds of chomping and the wet sounds of flesh as it was ripped and tossed.

In the middle of the room there was a dark figure. As we looked at it, the chomping stopped and a large carcass was tossed aside.

It charged and I felt something sharp against my neck.

"Rosie!?"

"Oh, it's just you guys. Want some?" She held out a fistful of meat.

I looked at the carcass, it was another diseased bear.

"Why the hell are you eating that?"

"To get it's strength!" She stood as she flexed her non-existent muscles and sheathed her dagger.

"I think that only works for John."

"Nope, it'll heal you, try some." She waved the rancid meat at me.

"No, no thank you, sis can have my share." I shot a devious smile to my sister as she shrugged and took a bite.

Oh my god, she actually ate it.

"We have to do whatever we can to survive now. We don't know how long we're here for, and we need to eat something."

Rosie waived the meat at Wendy. "What about you Wendy?"

Wendy belched, "no thanks, I'm full."

Rosie resumed stuffing her face and Sis joined her as we all began going over what we had been through here. None of us knew what was going on and all of us had prayed to John.

Rosie smiled at us as she clenched her fist, "don't worry he'll-"

She stopped mid speech and pointed to the wall. The vines on the wall were dancing and squirming as if expecting something.

Rosie dragged the bear back in front of us and we crouched behind it as the wall opened and a woman walked through.

"Fura?"

Wendy ran over to her.

"No, something's wrong, come back!"

It was definitely Fura, but her eyes were glassy like the wolf's were and her hair had been replaced by those snake vines.

She grabbed Wendy by the neck and tossed her across the room. Wendy landed with a thud as she hit the far wall.

"Disgusting abominations. Affronts to nature!"

She looked at the head that I held in my arms.

"And a detestable Necromancer as well."

No, this isn't Fura, at least not anymore. I began chanting for the Soul Sphere. "Vinctum anima mea, sphaera, Ralphus habet ingens mentula!" As I finished my chant the flame dissipated from the eyes of the head I held and a huge flaming soul sphere appeared in my hand.

Shit, I only have one shot at this.

"But rejoice, at least one of you will become my servant and spread my offspring to the world. The rest may live with me here and serve as incubators for my children."

She gestured with her hand and the vines from the wall shot out toward me. Sis pushed me out of the way as the vines pierced and wrapped her, pulling her back towards the wall.

As I fell to the ground, I focused to maintain the sphere.

"Sis!"

The pulling stopped as sis found a foothold. She grimaced with blood-stained teeth as she began to pull away. The vines started ripping and tearing from the wall as she shot a bloodthirsty look at the thing that was once Fura.

It cocked its head as a look of confusion spread across its face.

Rosie dived out from behind the bear and began slashing madly at Fura. She had no technique but made up for it in ferocity. Unfortunately, each hit did no damage. Finally she thrust her dagger straight into her chest, it stuck there with a hollow thunk.

Rosie dived back and rejoined me behind the bear. "She's like hitting a log. give me your dagger."

She grabbed my dagger and charged back into stabbing range, but Fura shot out more vines from the wall. Rosie skillfully dodged them and struck out at Fura's outstretched hand.

"No! Why do you have this!"

Fura tore off her own hand where the blade had nicked it and another grew in its place.

Rosie did not relent in her assault as Fura was pushed back.

This may be my one shot.

"Rosie, get away!"

I hurled my soul sphere. It screamed as it flew towards her and a look of terror was all she could manage before it hit her in the face and exploded into bright green flames that danced along her body.

She shrieked and disappeared through the wall, leaving us in silence.

Rosie picked up Wendy and brought her over to the bear as my sister stumbled over to me and I guided her to be with everyone else.

Rosie pulled off more meat and handed it to my sister. "Eat, it will heal you."

We all ate this time, who knew when 'Fura' would be back.

My sister began to sit normally again and I knew she was feeling better.

Wendy came to, followed by the girl we saved.

Wendy's eyes began to tear up. "Why would she hurt me?"

After what had happened at our town, I knew exactly what she was going through. It's hard for us to trust someone after our parents sold us out twice, and Fura was someone we trusted. Wendy was just running up to greet her, only to be tossed against a wall. It was another betrayal, but was that really Fura? She didn't seem the same, and Fura couldn't speak Therossian.

I used the sleeves of my robe to wipe her tears, "I don't think that was her. I think something took over her body, like these animals we've been killing. Maybe that's what she meant when she said we would be her servants."

My sister stood with glowing eyes and pointed to the wall behind us. "They're coming."

I grabbed Wendy's dagger and began cutting off the bears head. I needed a new soul prison.

Rosie leaped up and tossed her dagger from hand to hand, "Let's get these fuckers!"

Wendy cringed, "What do I do?"

I finished severing the bears head. "Use your blood, Whatever these things are, they don't seem to like it."

Belairia pointed to another wall, "From there as well, another bear I think."

Wendy gave me a pleading look. "How do I do that?"

I tossed her back her dagger as the walls opened.

## Chapter 29: Healing - John

I watched as my men and women stood once more and returned to their kin, then I visited Leera.

At first I thought that my army wasn't hit that hard because our casualties were lower than theirs but now, when I see the sheer number of wounded, I'm taken aback.

All those wind blades cut through everything. There isn't a single member of my group or the phalanx who isn't injured or maimed. The only group that is relatively intact are the ranged, and they still took several hits. Hopefully now that they have a few barrier spells they can come out of it better next time.

The elites seem okay, in that their injuries aren't as severe. Deep cuts here and there and one old gob who's just casually sitting there with half his scalp hanging off like it's a new hat. I guess things were different in their time.

Leera looked like she had worked herself to the bone. I can't imagine how long she must have been standing here healing. She probably only took breaks to recharge her mana.

I picked up a couple of bodies and walked over to some of the more injured gobs and began fleshcrafting them.

With Mors' help it didn't take me long to get the injured back on their feet and restore Blue.

Red smiled at me and kneeled. He seems happy to see his friend again.

Now, it's time to bring Bob back and upgrade myself before I face whatever has taken my daughters.

I closed my eyes and opened the soul screen.

"Alright Bob, any requests?"

"Nah, I like my current body, and I got all these new spells to play around with. Speaking of which, you should

take the Past Life spell, I don't need it since other me used it already and I got his memories... Sweet, sweet, step-daughter filled memories... Also Caligula?"

"Huh?"

"Nothin' to worry about Boss."

"Okay then."

I closed out of the soul screen and looked at Bob's magic.

Spells:

Dark Tendrils: Lvl. 1

Petrifying Gaze: Lvl. 1

Weakness: Lvl. 1

Fireball: Lvl. 4

Glimpse Past Life: Lvl. 1

Unknown: ???

That weird one is still there. I wonder if that's part of why Bob is still alive.

Okay I'm absorbing that Glimpse Past Life spell, "Mors, do you name these?"

Mors appeared and looked at me anxiously, "Only the ones that none of my souls know of."

"So, Glimpse Past Life then?"

"...Yes Master"

I sighed, I'm pretty sure she also named Increased Perception of Time as well. I feel like she would call magic missile something like homing mana projectile.

Mors pouted, "well, if it's not to your tastes then you can name them from now on."

"I'm sorry, I wasn't making fun. I was just curious why, if you name them, is there still a spell called unknown."

"That's because I'm unable to figure it out. There's something strange about it. It's almost more of an affinity than a spell, that's why I classified it as one before. There really is no way to tell what it actually does, if anything at all."



Huh, another Bob mystery.

Well, let's remake Bob... Again. If we ever get an armorer I'm going to opt for the Bob Armor DLC. Maybe we can find a Dwarf. That would be amazing, I'd have someone to drink with and hurl Scottish obscenities and not be sexually harassed by.

Shit, I've overused the calming effect again haven't I?

"Just a little."

I should still be fine. I'll just have to keep focus.

I opened my eyes and began dragging horses together. I had four horses and two men, that should be enough.

"Let's get started."

"Yes Master."

My hands moved at high speed as I began pulling things apart and rearranging them, and soon my friend was whole once more.

I imparted all abilities, used blend and infused his soul.

"Boss!"

"We already did this and we need to find the girls."

Bob's smile faded and in a flash he was gone.

I dragged two more horse corpses together.

"Mors, I'm going to try something new. Let's condense everything together like we did for Athen, but to the extreme."

I began focusing on fusing the two bodies together, then adding them to myself. As I added more and more muscle and bone it became difficult.

It was like squeezing a water balloon between your hands as hard as you could without breaking it. I continued to focus and eventually I had merged most of their bodies into myself.

"Master, any more and you'll start losing abilities like IPT. You're also greatly increasing your need for caloric intake. If you continue, feast will likely activate on it's own due to hunger."

"Alright, I get it." I cut off merging with what was left, and just like she said I was overcome with an urge to devour the remains.

I tore at them in a rage, filling my stomach until no flesh was left. All I saw now where a random assortment of bones.

"It's hard to move. I feel slow, lethargic."

"If you want to keep things like this then you'll need to use fleshcrafting constantly, just to move at the rate you used to."

Let's give it a try.

When I used fleshcrafting in conjunction with my normal muscles on my arms, my hands seemed to disappear from where they started and reappear where I wanted them. My speed was incredible, but I don't have anything around here to test my strength.

Durability then. I picked up a sword and hacked into my left forearm. It connected with a dull thudding noise similar to wood and only sunk in an inch or so. I repeated my swings until the blade started to warp then looked at the overall damages. I could still flex my fingers, and move my wrist freely even though my arm looked like a new butcher's first attempt.

I used fleshcrafting and healed my injuries. This is a little mentally exhausting to always be using fleshcrafting for even the simplest motions but over time I should get used to it.

In fact maybe there are more possibilities here than I realize. I focused and my arm turned into a bone spike then I manipulated it into a saw-toothed shape like my weapon.

I tried out a few more forms, including a whip and a shield.

Yes, If I can master this then I'll have an edge.

'Level Up!'

"It's similar to how high level flesh golems move and fight Master."

"Ah, thank you for that I guess."

I looked at the bones that were laying in front of me. I feel like I'm forgetting something. I know I brought everyone back, and healed the injured. I upgraded myself, and threscia now has a body. I would have my men take the armor and weapons, but most of them are out searching for our missing ones. I just can't shake this 'did I leave the stove on' feeling.

"Mors, can you think of anything I'm forgetting."

"The death knight."

"Oh yeah, that guy. Thrall I think it was."

I closed my eyes and Mors greeted me.

"Alright, take me to him."

The world swirled in flashes of green and black and he was once again in front of me.

He bowed, "My liege."

"It's time, are you ready to rejoin the world of the living?"

He smiled a wicked smile and nodded slowly as a cold sweat formed on my brow. I'm starting to think this might not be a great idea but after using death magic, I can honestly say having my army taught magic like that would give us an advantage despite our small number.

Mors brought me back to the soul screen and Soul of Obitus' Champion was added.

I opened my eyes and stared again at the bones. I'm not making Thrall anything that resembles human. The thought of unleashing him into an unwary population or allowing him to have a handsome persuasive form to start his religious order again seemed naive. No, he's going to look just like what his soul feels like to me.

I gathered the bones, then walked to the individual campfires and gathered the bones from where my gobs had been eating and sat in front of a taller, bulkier human body.

"Mors, access my memories on something called a Bone Devil."

"Are you sure that's a good idea Master?"

"It will work, he'll never be able to influence humans if he looks like their nightmares."

"No, I mean, physically."

I thought about it for a while. "It's fine, we'll make him chambered like a crustacean. He'll look similar, have great strength and speed, along with giving me a chance to put this Acidic Venom to use.

I assembled the bone around the body and began encasing the muscles within. I grew out a large tail and at it's tip I used the venom chambers that the queen had. I thought about making wings, but with the current weight of his body I knew he wouldn't be able to fly without a massive wingspan. This is my first skinless flesh construct and I wondered how it would turn out. He wouldn't have the same tactile feelings that a normal person would, and his diet would have to be much higher in calcium, which would be fine. He could eat the bones that others discarded as inedible. That meant that his teeth would need to be condensed and have a thick layer of enamel.

As I formed his body I added strategic spikes where I thought they would be effective. I also added something similar to a chambered hydraulic system greatly increasing his strength.

I used blend and looked at my final creation. His head had the semblance of a skull with pale green eyes. I gave him two rows of molars so he could chew bone without issue and a multi-segmented neck. His entire body was encased in bone and his fingers ended in sharp claws. His elbows were sharp and ended in a point. I used an almost reverse jointed leg ending in sharp raptor like talons. and his tail was segmented and scorpion-like.

If his goal were truly to serve me then he should love this body. It's possible the most dangerous flesh construct I have ever made.

I used blend and imparted all abilities.

I then infused his soul and backed away.

It took a few seconds to take effect but he eventually opened his eyes. He looked at his hands and slowly rose.

"Yes! My liege truly understands me. This the best possible body for me!"

"I'm glad you like it, now go. Help Threscia and Bob find my daughters."

He kneeled once more and without a word was off.

Threscia took my weapon. Perhaps I should use the weapon left by Tristus. I like axes and it would be great to have an enchanted weapon.

I walked to the axe and examined it. Shit, Light attuned. I can't use this, nor can any of my men. No one here has the light affinity.

I heard a few startled screams followed by Red bellowing "Flank it, we cannot allow it to reach the wounded!"

I already mended the wounded.

I ran towards the commotion and arrived in time to see Red swinging his tree down on Thrall.

Right, I probably should have informed them that he was a friend and not some creature trying to ambush us.

Thrall dodged to the side and used his spiny tail to rip the tree out of Red's hands. Red wasn't dissuaded and without missing a beat he hurled his makeshift shield. Thrall held out his hand and a massive torrent of grotesque miasma shot out, hitting the shield as it flew at him. The shield seemed to disintegrate and the area around him was covered in rotting wood.

Thrall twitched his tail and I knew what was coming next. I had to stop this before it got out of hand.

I yelled, "hey! Stand down!"

Red looked at me with a puzzled expression as the spike of Thrall's tail pierced his chest.

I moved using IPT and pulled the stinger free as the ground around us was sprayed with the foul smelling venom.

"Master, You died... Again."

I ripped Thralls stinger off and jammed it in his mouth.

Thrall's eyes opened wide as I spoke, "If you ever disobey me again, I'll give you a taste of your own medicine."

I threw his stinger on the ground as I checked on Red and my surrounding men. They all seemed to be fine for the most part. None of the venom had touched them. Unlike me, Red had the common sense to jump back when the tail came free.

I used fleshcrafting to mend the hole in his chest.

Thrall was just standing there holding his severed stinger.

I sighed, "Come here, I'll mend that for you."

He approached me and I mended his tail.

"My liege, I didn't mean-"

"I know, but next time when I say stand down, you stand down."

"What means stand down?"

I closed my eyes.

"Mors, you taught him English right? I mean that's what we've been speaking this entire time."

"Yes Master."

So then this guy is bullshitting me.

"Not necessarily. He may not know the concept. From what I could understand from his soul, and his stated beliefs, his people fought specifically to die. So stopping or retreating from a conflict might be foreign concepts to him even though he knows the words."

Now's not the time for micro managing the newcomer.

I opened my eyes.

"Thrall, follow Red, and do what he tells you. Red, teach Thrall all you know about tactics and explain things like retreating and standing down."

I hope they get along.

I looked over at Leera, she was sleeping in the same spot she was standing in earlier. Lina had laid down beside her and covered her with her wing.

I still have those healing and resurrection spells just hanging out doing nothing, as well as that useless axe.

It looks like I'm going to have to make a healer.

I walked back over to the bodies and opened the soul screen.

"Mors, show me a list of light attuned souls."

Soul of Sir Tristus: 100%

Soul of Yurich: 100%

Soul of an Aged Healer: 100%

I wonder if they're all related? I know Tristus and Yurich are. I still feel bad for the hand puppet thing but at that time I was in a rage and Tristus definitely gave the order. I can understand them however. They are soldiers, it was nothing personal to them, they were just doing their jobs. It still pisses me off though, What they did to Lina is something I can never forgive. I refuse to bring back Sir Tristus, but I will definitely make use of his soul.

The aged healer must have been that old guy we saw chanting, probably the one that Threscia used Petrifying Gaze on. I learned that bringing back someone with magic experience can lead to unforeseen consequences. But what if I consumed his memories and personality?

"He would be a blank slate soul. Those can be good or bad. He won't know the concept of anything, so he won't really be able to be loyal, or dependable. It'll be like raising a baby, and it could be years before he was useful to you."

Well, I guess that's out.

"Would he keep his affinities?"

"Yes, but only on a basic level."

I think I know what to do here. I converted his memories and personality into mana. I then converted Yurich's memories to mana and combined their souls. This way Yurich will have the skills of an aged healer, while also bumping up his affinity a little.

I felt bad about what happened to him, and I think he deserves another chance even if he did almost kill me with that first heal. But if this aged healer had been the one to do it I think it may have succeeded so in a way he kinda saved me.

Alright, fine, let's consume Sir. Tristus' memory and personality as well, then add him to the amalgamation.

Mana 10,262/10,262

"Mors, teach it English and bring up its spells and skills please."

### Soul Amalgamation

#### Spells:

Heal(Light): Lvl. 7

Resurrection (Light): Lvl. 6

Resurrect All (Light): Lvl. 1

Light Barrier: Lvl. 5

Enhance Weapon (Light): Lvl. 6

#### Skills:

Swordsmanship: Lvl. 5

Axesman: Lvl. 4

Shield handling: Lvl. 5

Mounted Combat: Lvl. 6

Military Tactics: Lvl. 5

Cooking: Lvl. 4

Ancient Text Translation: Lvl. 4

Yep, this guy will make a good battle medic. It kinda sucks being the only one who's affected negatively by heals. I'll have to steer clear of him during combat. No, actually I'll just teach him to steer clear of using resurrect all around me, and not to heal me directly.

I'm tempted to speak to him, but I've already learned not to talk to an amalgamation before they get a body. They



probably look like something from a horror movie right now.

I opened my eyes to see Athen standing in front of me, holding pants out towards me with a horrified expression on his face.

"Dad, please!"

I looked down, I knew I was forgetting something.

"Sorry Athen, I was just taking the twins for a walk."

It's sad that my men are so used to this stuff from me that they didn't even see fit to mention it. Then again, there was the whole two-dong John episode.

I put on the Pants and found some suitable boots and put those on as well.

Athen must think I'm already senile.

Athen cleared his throat. "I thought of a name for my group. We'll be the Shadow-Prowlers!"

I resisted the urge to facepalm. Yep, he's still a teenager.

"Maybe run that by the rest of your group first, and discuss what name everyone wants."

Athen looked down at his feet. "You don't like it?"

"No, no, it's super special awesome. Just, maybe ask everyone else their opinions on it before deciding it on your own. But for now you should help find your sisters!"

He jumped a bit. "I didn't know they were missing."

"They seem fine for now, but Fura is suffering. I'll join you after I'm through with what I'm doing here."

With that, he ran off.

If I'm going to be abandoning my camp, I'll need this healer. Leera is drained and this place takes every chance I give it to hurt me or those I care about. It's not a situation where I can simply leave everyone as is and hope for the best.

I condensed the body in front of me to give it some additional strength and muscle. Even though he had the skills to fight I didn't make him for that, and I'd rather he focused on healing. I imparted all abilities and used blend. I didn't like the eye color, it resembled mine because that's

the default of the ghoul, windigo effect. Let's make them dark blue.

I infused his soul and stepped back.

He opened his eyes, cocked his head and looked at me.  
"Hello?"

"Hi, how do you feel?"

"I'm fine?"

"Relax here for a while, sometimes it takes time to grow into a new body."

He laid back down and I went to fetch him a robe. I need someone to bring him up to speed.

I saw Red and thrall talking to each other and approached them.

"So then, you don't simply die?"

"No, we must live for John. We retreat when ordered."

"There's that word again. I'm just not getting this. You also said something like I'm not supposed to kill everyone?"

"Yes, do not kill allies."

"What if they have something I want?"

"Sorry to interrupt you two but I have another addition, follow me."

I led them to... Dammit I have to name him don't I. Nope, I'm letting Athen do it, he likes naming stuff.

I tossed the robe to our new healer and instructed Red to teach him how everything works here.

Now to find my daughters.

## Chapter 30: The Search - John

I followed where I was pulled to several times. It feels like they're right here. But right here is nothing. It's just another space of forest not far from where the supplies were. I've repeated this over and over again, following one pulling sensation after another. It all ends in frustration.

Could they be caught in another dimension? A time warp maybe? How does that dance go again?

No! This is impossible. They're scared and in pain and I can't reach them!

I looked up at the sky, then down at the ground. There were no indentations or dig marks. The leaves were still covering the soil mostly undisturbed except for the places I had stepped.

Well, I can't break through dimensions, I can't turn back time, trust me I've tried. That leaves me with the only thing I can do.

Dig.

"Bob!"

I felt a rush of wind and Bob was in front of me his face shown an expression not unlike mine. I'm guessing he had been sniffing them out.

"Boss, I keep runnin' in circles. It's like they were here, but I can't find where."

"I know, let's dig. It's all I can think of right now."

I transformed my arms into large curved spikes and began tearing at the earth. Bob began helping from the side and we began to make steady progress downward until we hit stone.

"Boss, did you forget to craft the pickaxe?"

I stared at Bob in disbelief. His sense of humor was like a cockroach, it could survive anything.

Wait a minute, he might actually have a good idea.

"Go fetch me a few swords, daggers and as much bone as you can find. Also if you happen to see Liz send her here as well."

Bob rushed off and I was again left alone with my uncertain task. I couldn't be sure that this was the right thing to do. If they were trapped somewhere else and I was just digging a hole in the forest for no reason while they suffered, then I'm not sure I could forgive myself.

I hardened my point and brought my bones to the surface as I began chipping away at the rock. This felt unpleasant, but it was the only thing I could do for now. The chips turned into cracks and the cracks began to split open. I stopped for a moment and pressed my ear to the split I had made hoping to hear some sign of life. Several seconds passed and I began to hear something like the beating of a heart.

"Boss."

"God dammit! That's it, I'm making you a bell."

Bob dropped several swords and lengths of bone on the ground with a clattering noise.

"I couldn't find Liz, but these were easy."

I picked up a sword and shaped bone around it, giving it a block over the handle.

"Here you go Bob, one pickaxe. Drive it into that split, while I make another one to help you out. Together we should be able to pry it open."

I began crafting a second Pickaxe, but noticed Bob just standing there staring at me like I was crazy.

"Why aren't you digging?"

"There ain't no split here Boss."

I looked back down at the rock. It was as he said, there was no damage, not even the small chips I had made earlier.

Bob and I just looked at each other dumbfounded. Fine, time for some blast mining.

I lept on Bob's back.

"Damn what'ya been eating? You weigh as much as a couple of horses."

"That's accurate. Just run, we need to get some space between us and this crack."

Bob took off as things blurry around us.

"That's far enough."

I formed a massive wind barrier and began closing it in. I kept oxygen, methane and hydrogen. It's strange, but when I did it I could see it. It looked like a ball of ice. That means they must have buried theirs or hid it behind a tree.

I lowered my compressed barrier into the hole we had dug. This was killing me, I'm definitely not a wind mage. If it weren't for my huge mana pool this would be impossible for me.

"Alright, hit it with a fireball."

My goal was to drop out the bottom of the barrier as Bob's fireball impacted in order to channel the explosion downward.

Bob reared up and inhaled deeply. His eyes glowed red and he began to chant. "I'm a firin' my ball!"

...That can't be the chant.

A massive fireball appeared in front of us and Bob yelled as it shot forward. It impacted with my barrier shattering it completely. The air around us shook as it was drawn in and the explosion itself shattered my eardrums. The light coming from the blast remained and shined like white hot phosphorus as the trees around it began to burst into flames.

We may have put too much into that one.

Fuck, I'm about to start a massive forest fire. Smokey would be so disappointed in me.

I mended my eardrums, and did the same for Bob. But the only sound that could be heard was the roaring of hot wind as it thrashed all around us. Heat poured off in waves and licked at our skin like the devil's tongue.

I heard shouts and screams from the direction of our camp then noticed that the moon had disappeared from the sky. This could only be one of Liz's Ice Glaciers.

"Liz! Douse it!"

The massive glacier fell, and connected with the white orb making a high pitched screeching noise as they touched. The glacier exploded and we were pelted in hot steam and jagged shards.

Gradually the orb's light faded and it became something solid.

I looked around at the aftermath. Well, this is one way to create a clearing. The surrounding trees were both burnt and frozen and in the middle of it all was a massive pit of blackened earth.

We approached it as the sound of Red barking orders neared.

I hopped off Bob's back and tossed the black sphere aside. It was surprisingly light, and unfortunately still burning hot. I used fleshcrafting to shed the burnt bits of my arms as I peered into the hole.

The ground under it was red and gooey. It moved like it had a pulse. As I stared at it, I noticed the rock skin around it started reforming.

I dove down into the hole and thrust my hand into its flesh. If this thing's alive then I should be able to fleshcraft a hole.

Ability Gained: Asexual Reproduction

Ability Gained: Camouflage - Mimicry

I don't care about abilities now. I only want this obstruction gone.

I used fleshcrafting and began to hollow out a hole but as I split flesh it flowed over the gaps I was creating at an equal speed. Whatever this thing was, its regeneration was just as fast as my fleshcrafting.

I looked up and saw all my men looking in.

"Thrall, get down here."

"Yes, My liege."

He jumped in and eyed the red ground with obvious interest. "It's... beautiful."

"Maybe so, but I need to get through it. Put your stinger to use. Whatever it is, damage alone won't cut it."

Thrall began stinging it mercilessly. It's regeneration slowed but did not stop. My progress was still slower than it's regeneration.

"My liege, move back. I have something that will be more effective here."

I jumped back. "Hurry, don't let it seal itself up again."

His eyes flashed a sickly green as he unleashed that torrent of rot he used before. The red flesh under us gradually sagged and turned black as the pulsing stopped. With a wet plopping sound it fell away and I could see a dark cavity below.

I jumped in and Thrall followed behind me.

Bob called at me from the hole. "I'm coming with ya!"

"Bob, you're about as big as this room, I don't think you'll fit."

"Make me fit."

Bob reached down with his arm and I lept and grabbed it.

"Alright Bob, I'm giving you body reduction."

I condensed what I could and reformed him to be bipedal. I had to leave behind most of his bulk and revert him to something similar in stature to the wendigo.

Bob's body separated and his slim self slipped through leaving the rest around the hole above.

I heard a second thump after Bob and Threscia was behind me. This was a full room. Hopefully no more wished to come.

"The rest of you guard this hole and make sure it doesn't seal up."

"My love, I'll come too. My brother and sister are among the missing."

I looked up to see Nex's tear stained face. She was a strong woman, but I could tell she was distraught. I knew she would act recklessly and I don't want to see another one of my mates dead. It would kill me to learn she was pregnant and to bury another unborn child.

"Then have faith in me as your mate and chief. I will bring them back. You need to guard our people. Look at who is in this room, we will not fail. And I'll personally see to it that whatever being thinks it's okay to take my followers, even my very daughters, will suffer and be consumed!"

She yelled out in protest but Liz grabbed her and pulled her away as Ice covered the hole preventing it from reforming.

Thank you Liz. Smart but psychotic, she somehow still manages to be reliable.

I looked around the pit. The walls were covered in vines and roots. There were no doors but I could sense a follower just through the wall.

"Let's just bust our way through."

I once again formed my arms into pointed blades and began hacking and stabbing the wall beside us. The more I destroyed the quicker it grew back, thicker than before.

Thrall began "My liege, all-"

Threscia stabbed the wall with her bone spear as a grimace formed on her face. She groaned and I could see her tense up as she injected something.

The wall began to melt away.

"Ah, Threscia. I hardly recognized you. Did you use it?"

"Thrall!? That's an interesting look you have there. But now's not the time, my sister is in here somewhere."

I began hacking at what was left. The brittle sludge began falling in clumps as I made a hole big enough for us to get through.

"Master-"



"Yeah, I figured, I'm dead again."

"Nobody touch the hole if you can help it."

Bob laughed, "but I like touching holes."

We made our way into the next room, being careful not to touch the edges.

"My liege, this place reeks of life. We're surrounded by it."

I looked at Thrall, who had an expression like he just smelled one of Bob's farts. "Yeah, I kinda figured that by the fact we went through a fleshy opening."

Bob let out a resounding ha and Threscia rolled her eyes at him.

In the middle of the room was a little goblin boy.

I picked him up and used fleshcrafting to wake him.

He looked up at me, "God John? Where are we?"

I sat the boy down, "We're inside of something but we're not far from camp. Go through that hole over there and wait in the room with a opening in the ceiling."

Now that I think about it, I told Liz to keep the opening from sealing back up and she covered it with ice. How are we supposed to get out? Oh well, that's a problem for later. One follower saved, on to the next.

We went through three more rooms and guided each person back to the exit to wait for whenever Liz opens it again.

As we made our way through we eventually came upon a room that was a little different. This room was already opened into another room with a pile of red sludge and fur in the doorway.

We made our way around it and into the second room. There was a small hole in the far wall there.

I looked at the small hole, it resembled the holes we'd been making. "It looks like we're getting closer to finding something."

Threscia stepped forward and injected her venom into the wall. "Hopefully Roscia."

Thrall turned to Threscia, "My apologies Mistress, but has anyone ever told you you may have an unhealthy love for your sister?"

Bob smiled, "ooh, can I watch?"

Threscia ignored Bob and looked at Thrall. "There's nothing wrong with loving your family."

Bob laughed, "You're preaching to the choir, sister. I know I loved mine!"

Thrall shuddered, "ew... Family."

Bob licked his lips, "mmm... Family."

I finished cutting away the wall and we moved forward. There was another open room, this one was covered in blood splatter. Threscia clenched her fists.

I would like to tell her that Rosie's alive, but I feel the pulling either way. I can feel her mental state however, she's... Excited?

I put my hand on her shoulder... and immediately pulled it away while shrieking like a little girl.

"Holy fucking shit! What the ever loving bulls ass!? There's not one on me is there?"

She had those freaky nightmare bugs under her hair. I think one might have touched me...

Calming effect!

She reached her hand back and one crawled out onto it. "Ah, I see you've finally noticed my cute little minions."

It rolled over and she started tickling it's belly and baby talking it.

I blinked several times as my mind processed what it was seeing. Mors had replayed what had happened while I was out, but I didn't know she was carrying these spawns of satan around with her pirate style.

"Sorry Master, I didn't think it was important..."

"I, it's alright Mors. I'm just a little shaken, that's all."

Bob was laughing, "Ever loving bulls ass, huh?"

"Oh, did you want to pet one?" Threscia held out her hand to... Where'd he go?

I felt a trembling hand on my shoulder as Bob hid behind me.

Thrall's eyes sparkled as he held out his hands as if in reverence. "Mistress, I dare not touch something so glorious, but will you allow me the honor just this once."

Threscia held out her hand and the nightmare bug crawled into Thrall's open palm. He looked at it while wiping a single tear from his eye. "It seems like only yesterday that I collected these as a child, but the one's in my time were much smaller. This one is exceptional, yes a proud warrior! I will call him Feroxus."

"Hey, I didn't give you permission to name him! His name is Fernando and he likes tummy rubs. Now give him back."

Bob and I took a few steps back while they argued over 'Fernando's' best traits.

"Boss, they ain't right."

"Nothing ever is around here. Come on everyone, we need to keep moving."

We stepped through a sludge of organs and fur into the last room. I looked at the wall and noticed that the vines were thicker in an almost perfect square pattern.

Threscia examined it. "Is it a hidden door?"

I shrugged as I fleshcrafted my arm into a spike and struck it a few times.

Bob pointed to it, "just press A or X."

Thrall tilted his head, "Press a what, Orex?"

Threscia injected her venom again and we just broke through normally. As we entered the next room we were greeted by a massive wall of dead animals and goblins. If I jumped I could see over, but all I saw were more bodies.

"It looks like we're going to have to sift through them. Help me separate our Gobs from the animals."

I pulled out a woman's body. Something about it seemed unusual. I opened her eyes, her pupils were glossy, as if she had gone blind and as I looked at her skin I could see something squirming underneath.

"Nobody touch any of the bodies yet."

I used fleshcrafting to isolate whatever it was and bring it to the surface. It was some sort of a vine, worm creature. It flopped around a bit and attempted to bite at me with it's bulbous head. I used fleshcrafting and merged my finger to it. That much is good, at least it's more flesh than wood.

### Ability Gained: Galvanism

Galvanism is the ability to chemically produce a small electrical current that can stimulate muscle movement. The current is not powerful enough to cause harm, but when applied directly to a muscle or nerve group it will allow you to manipulate muscles.

"Mors, what the hell is this thing?"

"I'm sorry Master but I'm not sure, it reminds me of when you first merged with Fura in the forest right after she drained you."

"So, would there be any side effects if I used blend on the woman with all these things inside her?"

"Increased muscle movement and better reflexes, I believe."

I see no downsides here. In fact I'm going to add this to myself. I merged the creature into my arm and fleshcrafted the rest of my body to add Galvanism. I moved my arm a few times without using fleshcrafting to speed it up. It seems to be pretty effective, I'm almost as fast as I used to be, but for now I'll have to keep moving with fleshcrafting.

I used Soul Steal and mended the woman. I then used blend and reinfused her soul back into her body.

"Two-Do... I mean, God John?"

"Just call me John. Follow the trail of holes until you find a group waiting by an opening in the ceiling. There's only one way you can go, so you should be fine, just don't touch the edges."

She ran off and I continued to dig through rotting animals to get my gobs. I did the same for each of them and sent them on their way.

This place has really pissed me off. They took my weakest right from under our noses, while the rest were fighting. I had promised them safety, but this thing had the gall to take them, and slaughter them wholesale. But as angry as I am, what am I supposed to do when a place is my enemy? Is it a creature, an animal? When I'm done here I'm turning this place to sludge.

I collected all the animal souls and began putting them into a soul amalgamation for my convenience. It's easier to convert that to mana than it is to go one by one and convert souls.

I looked at one of the snake vines souls to see its skills. The only skill it had was burrowing. It had no magic. I just added it to the amalgamation and continued.

By the time we were done pulling out the bodies of our people, there were only eight more pulling sensations in the area.

I fleshcrafted a tunnel through the dead things to get to an impassable wall of corpses. There were so many here that I didn't have enough space to push them to the side.

I sighed, "it looks like we're going to have to drag these bodies back through the tunnel and start stacking them in other rooms.

"Why ain't ya more excited Boss. This is basically like buyin' in bulk for you."

"You could use corpse explosion!" Thrall said, sounding every bit like a Saturday morning cartoon host.

"No, some of our people could still be buried in this mess. If I destroy their bodies then I can't bring them back. Not to mention these animals will make good raw materials like Bob said."

Threscia just looked around. "Good god, what happened here?"

I shrugged, "I'm not sure, maybe this is how this creature digests. Maybe you could send Mr. Fernando out to scout."

"I would, but it's solid, maybe if you give me a boost I could put him on the ceiling."

I picked her up on my shoulders and she ejected her bone spear to touch the ceiling. 'Fernando' crawled up it and began making his way above the bodies.

Bob grinned, "God speed Fernando, ya sexy latin bastard."

The bug looked back for a second, and I could almost swear I could hear the Mexican National Anthem. It must be all these spores we've been inhaling.

Why the hell is he named Fernando anyway. That's not exactly Therossian, and I didn't know any Fernandos, at least not in the later half of my life.

Four of the pulling sensations just got stronger. "Fuck!"

"What?" Threscia said from my shoulders.

I lowered her back to the ground, "we need to hurry. Clear the way."

I began desperately tossing bodies down the tunnel I made. I don't care if it blocks the way out, as long as I can go forward. Bob began helping me, followed by Threscia and Thrall. Soon we were at a small clearing in the middle of the room with one headless bear corpse. The way in front of it seemed clearer than the way we had come, and I could see flashes of green light coming from the room ahead.

I rushed in to see Roscia and Belairia fighting something that looked like a tree woman, while Lil'sis and Wendy hung back. Lil'sis had one of those green orbs that I saw her practicing with a few days ago, and Wendy was bleeding badly from her hand.

"Mors, what the hell is that thing?"

"I believe it's a Spriggan. They're like an offense oriented Dryad. They are entirely wooden, and have thick bark for armor."

"Roscia!" Threscia called out, but Roscia was too wrapped up in defending herself to respond.

The spriggan shot vines out of its fingertips and pierced Belairia's stomach. She didn't flinch or waste the opportunity and pulled the spriggan towards her by her own vines. It hurled towards her face first as she lashed out with her tentacle, smashing the spriggan's face and coiling around its body.

The spriggan erupted in thorns that flew in all directions, causing Roscia and Belairia to dive back. The vines on the walls lashed out and grabbed all but Wendy and held them against the wall. They cried out in pain as the vines pierced them and I could feel my anger surpassing the calming effect.

I felt the dark embrace of my god as the black liquid began to ooze from me. What the hell does this thing think it is! What fucking balls, to do this in front of me. To hurt those I care about! I could feel my body changing. My teeth grew to sharp points and all my muscles hardened and tensed.

"Stop! You don't get to hurt my daughters!"

Before it could speak I was on it. I began tearing the bark from its flesh as its thorns pierced me. It seems like they're poison. "Fool, I don't need a pulse, just scream for me."

I peeled it slowly as its voice began to call out in pain. Wait, I recognize this voice.

I threw the creature down and stepped back. "Fura? What's happening?"

My heart sunk in my chest as I looked at my mutilated mate. She wasn't flesh anymore, she was raw, and green. Something has distorted her and undid everything that she's been through.

Fura's bark regrew and she spoke in Therossian. "Foul undead, is that little one your master? Begone from this sacred place!"

This wasn't Fura, though it did sound like our first conversation.

I could still feel Fura's soul calling to me. "Fura, are you in there?"

Bob yelled from behind me, "we got 'em down Boss, the girls are safe."

"John, I don't care if this thing is Fura... It-Hurt-Roscia!!" Threscia screamed in fury.

I heard Fura's voice, more tender than I had ever heard it before. "John, kiss."

Ah, this creature thinks I'm stupid. "Very well."

I opened my mouth revealing my teeth and leaned in. As it's lips met mine I felt several squirming sensations filling my mouth and throat.

I used blend on myself. "Thanks, I was getting a little hungry. I can see you've taken Fura's body, but you definitely didn't take her mind or you would know just how much shit your in right now."

I started my heart up again.

"How? W, what are you?"

Before I could respond the creature shed its bark and scurried towards the wall. It opened behind her and sealed not a second later.

"Threscia!"

She stabbed the wall with a vengeance and as the vines began to wilt I struck out at it.

Threscia stared blankly at the wall, "What's going on here?"

Behind the wall was rock, similar to what was covering the entrance.

I looked back at my daughters, they were hurt. I need to mend them before they get any worse.



## Chapter 31: Reunited - John

Wendy ran up and hugged me. "Daddy!"

"Master! You're dead!?"

"Mors, I don't care right now, my heart is melting."

I picked Wendy up and looked at the bloody spots where she had touched me. "You didn't touch anyone else with that hand did you?"

She looked down and pouted.

"It's okay, you're not in trouble. Just tell me what happened."

"I killed lots of em. Almost as much as Rosie, but she was using my blood, so it counts."

I looked back the way we had come. Holy hell, I've never been more proud of anything in my life.

I sat her down and looked at her hand. The wound had already sealed up.

She pointed to the other girls, Belairia was leaning against a wall, Lil'sis was sitting in a corner, and Roscia was catching up with Threscia. "I ate lots of meat so I'm okay. Go help them."

I patted her head and booped her nose. Then ran over to Belairia who seemed to be the worst of them.

"Father!" She pushed off the wall and gave me a bear hug. Even with my new dense body I could feel my back pop.

I picked her up even though she was way too old for that and hugged her properly. I also took this opportunity to mend her using fleshcrafting. She actually had several punctures to her internal organs.

I sat her back down and ruffled her thick black hair. "I'm glad you're in high spirits."

"Ugh, those damn vines really take it out of me. The first couple times it happened I was shocked, now I'm just

annoyed. Every time we get close to killing her she just shoots out these vines and runs into another room. But each time she comes back she's a little stronger."

"Wendy said you guys are responsible for all the bodies earlier."

She smiled up at me, "yeah, I remember what you taught me. If I want to survive then I have to fight! I mainly held them back with my tentacle while Rosie finished them off. If things got too bad then Sis would hit them with her glowing ball thingy. And if they got too close to her Wendy would sling blood at them, for some reason that kills them too. Wait, are you crying? Did we do something wrong?"

I felt warm liquid pouring down my face, "No, I'm just so damn proud."

My daughters are not damsels in distress, they're a force to be reckoned with. I glanced at the piles of bodies again as Belairia wiped my tears. Is this what parents feel? I wish I had been able to become one in my previous life, maybe then I wouldn't have gone down the path of self destruction.

We talked a bit more before I thanked Belairia and walked over to Lil'sis.

She took her hood down and nodded to me. "Sup."

Oh god, is she in this phase?

I nodded back to her, "Not much, just mendin' my daughters yo."

"Yo?"

"Nevermind, that was a different time... and world."

I sat down next to her and she inched her way towards me. I put my arm around her and she caught me in a sideways hug before looking around to be sure no one saw her. Bob smiled and shot us a thumbs up. She blushed and put her hood back on.

I mended her and she sighed in relief.

"You girls did something amazing here. You fought, and won, repeatedly. I'm happy to be your father."

She looked up at me with her brown eyes and I could see a smile start to peek out.

"Careful now you're losing cool points by the minute with that expression."

She hugged me in earnest and I swear I could feel my bones crack. "I don't care, I'm awesome!"

"I heard you were using Raphus' spells earlier. You know I've got some of my own I could teach you later. That way you wouldn't have to rely on souls."

She smiled and picked up a severed wolf's head. "That would be good, it was starting to get inconvenient."

She handed me the head and I looked at it. It still had some dim flames coming from it's eyes.

"Mors, I seem to remember that I can make a soul prison."

"That was before you made me but yes, you can make one."

If I remember correctly the head is the most powerful part, but I can also use blood or a heart."

"Yes Master."

"How many heads would it take to contain the soul amalgamation I formed from all these creatures?"

"At least twenty-four maybe twenty-five just to be certain."

I stood and ruffled Celairia's hair under her hood, god I just love her hair. Maybe I should grow some hair like that.

I went to the massive pile of corpses and began severing and combining heads until I hit twenty-six. I was going to be extra careful. I didn't want this infusion to fail.

I used their bones and crafted a staff about three feet long. I added spikes to the cage at the end so it could be used as a mace, and condensed the bone as much as I could. From their skulls I formed a bone ball and put it inside the cage. I swung it a few times to make sure it was stable and infused the amalgamation into the ball.

I walked back and handed it to Celairia. "Here, It's all these creatures souls combined. It only seems fitting you use it, you earned it. I'm sorry about the weight, but you can also use it like a weapon. Later when we see Ralphus again I'll get some amber and make a better one, but for now this should last you a while."

She smiled from ear to ear. "I can't wait to kill something!"

"That's my girl!" I hugged her again and moved on to Roscia.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you two but-"

Roscia tackled me, followed closely by Threscia. "My sister's back!"

Threscia kissed me while Roscia hugged me, it was a weird combination.

Threscia smiled at me. "She killed so many of these things. Tell him Roscia!"

Roscia began to explain everything that had happened from the point when she got injured fighting the diseased bear to all the fights they had since then. Her only regret was that they failed to protect the goblin girl that they had with them.

"It's okay, I saved all my followers from the pile. There's only four left including Fura, so I'm sure the goblin girl is just waiting to be let out at the entrance. Fura and the other three souls are waiting just beyond that wall."

She smiled brightly and I gave them both a hug and returned to the wall predicament. Bob walked over and the three of them began talking.

Now, what do I do with this? There's not enough space in here to recreate what we did earlier. I'm also fairly certain a fire bomb like that would kill us all in this enclosed space.

Thrall joined me in staring at the wall of faux stone. "Perplexing isn't it." He scraped the pointy end of his finger along it. "I could get through it if it weren't for this outer coating."

"Maybe we can go around it."

I looked around the room. The wall beside Lil'sis was open, and a diseased bear was standing there motionlessly, staring at us with dead eyes.

I went to call out a warning, but the second I blinked it was gone.

"Everyone, move away from the walls."

## Chapter 32: Pursuit - John

That's it, I've had enough of this place.

"Girls, go back to the entrance and protect our people there. We're going to tear this place apart wall by wall."

I waited for the girls to depart. Threscia looked sad to see Roscia go, but I think she understand why I made this decision.

"Okay Thrall, use your death torrent? Doom beam? Whatever it's called to destroy as many walls as you can around this stone structure. Threscia and I will take the opposite side, and we'll meet in the middle."

To my surprise Thrall's spell tore through the walls at a quick pace. Now that our people were out of harm's way I didn't care how reckless we were to this place. He maintained his spell at a steady rate and threscia and I only got through two walls before we saw the wall in front of us melting.

"We're on this side, stop your spell."

He stopped and I looked through the rapidly melting wall at him. "On a scale of one to ten how would you rank that spell you just used in comparison to your other ones?"

"I would give it a solid three my liege but it's only one of two spells I have that don't require a body."

I looked back at the massive piles of bodies behind us and raised my eyebrow. "You know we do have more than a few bodies here."

He looked back at me and frowned. "I've already recommended corpse explosion to you. With your power that could be truly devastating. Perhaps it could even get us through this stone."

We walked around the walls we had destroyed looking for a way in through the rock. It looks like the rock goes all the

way around isolating this room from the rest.

The big problem here is that there are three other souls in the same room as the creature that took over Fura and Fura herself. I worry that if we blow up a wall we may blow them up with it and though I can't say that I'm in love with Fura, She's growing on me and I don't want to see her hurt or worse. Corpse explosion is dangerous, and not only to me. It has explosive and acidic properties. If she were blown up or dissolved by it I wouldn't be able to bring her back.

Thrall stopped walking and pointed up to the ceiling. There was something black moving among the roots and vines. As it came into focus it dropped and a sense of dread overcame me.

"Get it off! Getitoffgetitoff!!"

Calming effect!

Calming effect!

"Master breath!"

I calmed down enough to stop freaking out as I felt the little satan spawn come to rest on my forearm. I held it up and it's beady black eyes met mine as I tried to resist the urge to fleshcraft my arm off and run away.

"Space, above, empty."

Is this little piece of solidified nightmare actually talking to me?

"Yes Master, through pheromones. Try talking back but keep it simple, it doesn't really know linguistics."

"Space, how big?"

"Big?"

"Threscia, Fernando is talking to me, you take it from here while I shed all the skin he touched."

Threscia came over and took Fernando and began giving him belly rubs.

"He says there's a space above here, that's about three hims around."

"Great, so it's a tube?"

She paused her rubbing and nodded several times. "No, it's a series of holes, like a rabbit's warren. He also says he wants to eat rabbit, but there were none there. Aw, now he's saying he loves his mama."

I think I've had enough of Fernando for today. And where the hell is Bob?

I looked around the room to see a pair of red eyes peeking out from a pile of bodies. Of course.

Thrall placed his hand on his chin. "If you picked me up to that hole I could just gas them."

I nodded, "there's an idea but what would keep the gas from coming back into this room, or seeping through and poisoning our camp?"

He shrugged.

Yep, that was about what I was expecting.

Woo, I'm starting to feel dizzy. You know, maybe Fernando isn't that bad of a guy. Really, when you look at it I was the jerk here. He did his job and even greeted me. All I did was freak out... He's a good guy.

"Fernando, I love you man! You still freak me the hell out, but you're good people."

"Oh great, did you use the calming effect too much again?"

"Wanna see my van?"

"You got one too!" Bob chimed in, still from across the room.

"No... Now I'm sad."

"John, snap the hell out of it!"

I began fleshcrafting the bodies into a chair. "I'm just gonna sit down for a few so the world will stop spinning."

"John I swear to the dark god, if you don't get your head straight in the next few minutes I'm going to have my minions crawl into your ears and eat your brain."

I fleshcrafted my head open and pulled out some of my brain. "Here you go Fernando, may it serve you more than it does me."



"I always said Boss thinks with his lower heads, and this proves it!"

Threscia heaved and Thrall laughed a hearty laugh. "That laugh reminds me of someone, but who? Oh yeah... Leera, wait, no."

"Just, hurgh, put your brains back!"

"Ah don't worry it's just the frontal lobes, I don't n..."

"John!?"

"..."

"John! Oh god, someone help me put him back together!"

"Ha, got ya!"

Bob laughed from his body fort.

Threscia shook her head, "Ralphus already got me with that today and I fell for it again."

"My apologies, ma'am." I put my brain back in and tipped my cranium to her.

I bet if I were more like her precious bug she'd laugh at my jokes.

I scratched my brain, "Wait a minute, this gives me an idea."

Threscia pleaded with me, "please fix your head before you continue."

I fleshcrafted my skull back together. "Fernando's a pretty big bug, I bet three of him is pretty big as well. I'll just pull a smaller version of the rib cage trick and follow him in. Wait, no, I can do better."

I pulled a spine out of my new chair and fleshcrafted a centipede-like body out of it using what I learned from making Thrall's exoskeleton.

"Mors?"

Mors appeared and wearily curtsied.

"There's my pretty little lady, come here."

"Not now Master, you called for a reason?"

"Oh yeah... What was it?"

"Is it something to do with the centipede-like flesh-construct you made?"

"No... Wait, I mean yeah. I need to be cool like Fernando. Like... Climbing walls and stuff."

"So you intend to copy his feet?"

"Yeah, and the pincers, and the eyes, and whatever else."

"As you wish, gather some hair."

I ripped off a large patch of bear... Or was this a wolf? All I know is that it makes a comfy chair.

Mors took over and in a matter of seconds everything was complete.

I opened my chest, attached the centipede to my core and soon I was looking up at myself through dim vision.

Woah, this is trippy.

"You have more than two eyes now, the last time Threscia controlled the other two so it may take time to adjust."

I began crawling on the walls.

"This is great! you know what else would be cool?"

"What?"

Dark Shroud.

This cave is already dark, with this I'm probably damn near invisible.

Okay Threscia send Fernando up...

Threscia?

Oh right, bugs don't have vocal cords.

"Use the pheromones."

I crawled up Threscia's leg as she kicked and screamed.

Whoops, I canceled Dark Shroud.

"John, idiot."

"Threscia, Fernando, Guide."

Fernando crawled onto my back.

Get it off! Get it off!

"Master, you're a bug now too."

"Oh yeah."

I skittered up the wall and onto the ceiling. Fernando crawled off and for a second there it looked like he was waving me to follow.

What's this, I can smell his trail.

As we moved through the complex tunnels we kept encountering more and more of those vine snakes. Fernando took care of most of them, only stopping to eat every now and then. I was a little too big to move well and they were able to outmaneuver me a few times but Fernando had my back. We continued going in the direction the snakevines were coming from.

The tunnels narrowed and Fernando held up his pincers to call a stop at least I think that's what he's doing.

I activated Dark Shroud and approached the opening. There was a large room below us. I activated Life Sense and counted four bodies. Two of which were colder than the rest, which meant they had been dead for a while.

I slowly dug away at the tunnel with my mandibles until I could squeeze my head through. The two dead ones had bulging stomachs and every few seconds a small snakevine would crawl out of their mouths. The last one had a vine going from it to Fura who was rooted in the middle of the room, half her body submerged into the floor. She had a new sort of bark armor forming on her skin.

Well, I'm sober now.

"You, sneak, attack."

He crawled carefully along the ceiling until he was above her. I followed suit but decided it would be better if I had a body. I used Soul Steal as I made my way along the wall, and two souls flew inside me. The only living one was a boy. His eyes were bulged but his mouth was bound to prevent him from screaming. From his belly button stretched a large vine that was connected to Fura.

I could feel my anger welling up as I was reminded why I was here. He was just a boy, and whatever this thing was, it was using his still living body for nutrients while he looked on in horror as his body wilted away.

I crawled beside the older woman's body and fleshcrafted my way inside. I used blend and compacted my flesh inward

until I was small enough to slowly slip my way out of the vines that kept her.

I looked at Fura, her eyes were still closed. Whatever she was doing it seemed to take most of her focus.

I inched my way across the room to the young girl's body. As I passed by the boy his eyes followed me. They seemed to be crying out in desperation, but for now I couldn't help him. I had a feeling that if I interrupted her feeding she would wake up, and I couldn't afford that yet. No, if I failed here then not just him, but possibly everyone would die.

I carefully removed the vines from the girl and began merging my body with hers. I heard a thump beside me and saw the vine laying on the floor. The boy's eyes were closed and I no longer saw the rise and fall of his chest. I used Soul Steal.

Rest, you deserve it.

I quickly finished merging with the girl, but it wasn't enough. Fura was able to hold her own against my daughters and even managed to flee from me in my dense form.

I ripped the vines from the boy and began merging his body into my own. This way I could at least face her in my original form.

Her eyes shot open and I could hear a scream as she began to pull herself out of the floor.

Shit! I need more time!

She froze for a moment as she looked at something black on her shoulder before she began thrashing around wildly.

I owe you one Fernando. I'll make sure Threscia gives you all the belly rubs you can take later.

I continued merging myself with the boy and my body began to take its original form.

Behind me the thrashing stopped and things turned silent. I looked back to see Fura wiping her barked arm on the floor. When she raised it I saw the crushed black form of Fernando.

I used Blend.

He was a good guy dammit! She smiled at me and I felt that familiar embrace that let me know it was time to kill something. The black liquid poured from me, as waves of darkness radiated from my core.

"That face, that smile. It isn't yours!"

The closer I get to the dark god it seems like the angrier I become. I fought to control my breathing and maintain my rational thought, but I already knew that wasn't going to work.

The creature's smile at its momentary victory quickly turned to a grimace as it began backpedaling. The vines on the ceiling began striking down and piercing me.

I used fleshcrafting to force them back out again as they tried to pull me.

I ejected a bone spike and she eyed it nervously. "Give her back, or you won't like what comes next."

She continued to attack me with vines from the ceiling before switching to ones that came from her arms.

Belairia was right, these vines do get annoying.

I grabbed her vines and began pulling her towards me. "What's wrong, you seemed so talkative earlier."

She ripped out her own vines and slung herself back against the wall. As I got closer she opened the wall and turned to run, only to be greeted by Bob's smiling face, inches from hers.

She stifled a scream and closed the wall before opening the wall beside that one and barely avoiding Threscia's Bone spear as she closed it off again.

"They must have heard your screaming and now they smell blood. You're weak and they know it. This body isn't yours."

"She was mine! I birthed her, and you, demon, corrupted her perfect body! Making her rely on something that can only be called inferior to a great tree."

Though she spoke strongly she was wedged in the corner with nowhere to run.

I was finally close enough to grab her. I looked into her stolen eyes and saw the fear of death reflected as I held her in place.

I breathed out fog as I spoke, "you've taken my daughters, my people, and my mate. So let me repay you."

I thought back to Fura's original transformation. My mana and my blood turned her to flesh.

I used mana transfer at a rate of 100/second.

Her eyes began to bulge as her tongue came out in ecstasy. "I'll give you pleasure for a moment, but know there's pain coming."

Just like before, she shot vines into me. I allowed them to penetrate my skin as she began drawing blood at an incredible rate.

I had to consume part of my body to produce more blood, thereby lowering my density. I waited ten seconds and stopped the mana transfer.

Her vines continued to draw blood as a smile parted my lips. "The downside to not knowing her memories is that you get to experience Blend for the first time."

I pushed her to the floor, held her down and used blend. She shrieked as her body spasmed under me. "Sorry, you've changed her quite a bit so this may take a while."

"Mors, slow down Blend."

Soon her screams were all I could remember as they echoed through the room. I let it go on for hours before I finished it.

I looked at the creature, "are you still in there?"

It opened and closed its mouth a few times as the vines on the wall became shriveled twigs.

"I'll take that as a yes. Whatever you are, if you don't want me to continue, then get the hell out of Fura."

"I... Can't. I've been fused with her."

Maybe I am stupid.

I laid my hand on Fura's chest. She was warm and flesh colored, but it wasn't my Fura, not yet.

"There are other ways to separate you." I used fleshcrafting to stop her heart.

Soul Steal.

I infused Fura's soul back into her body. She lay there for a while motionless as I began to fear that the creature may have corrupted her soul itself.

After some time, she began to sniffle as I cradled her.

"Fura, are you alright?"

She sat up and slapped me.

Tears began streaking her face as she looked into my eyes "You took too long... The boy and his mother, they..."

I hugged her close as I kissed away her tears. "It's okay, their souls are inside me, I'll save them."

I held her as she cried against me. "She forced me to kill the green children. Some called to me by my name and when they saw me they were happy. Then I, I..." Her body was shaking as she continued. "I hurt our daughters. Wendy was smiling and I hurt her too."

Here she was, the merciless, selfish dryad, crying because she hurt someone. She really has grown up. I smiled down at her as I began running my fingers through her hair. That red hair, twice given.

She looked up at me with her sad eyes and we kissed. "It's okay, you've suffered for it, and it wasn't you who was doing it. It was that creature. I made her suffer as well."

Fura shot me an angry expression as she wiped her tears. "I felt that too!"

"Oops."

She smiled up at me and pressed her face into my chest. "It's okay, I deserved it. If not for what I did to these people, then for what I did to others in the past."

"Are you going to keep that bark on?"

She began kissing me softly, "Maybe I'll take off a few pieces of it."

I looked deep into her orange eyes as we embraced each other. She moved her legs around to straddle me and I became aware that I wasn't wearing pants and neither was she.

I felt myself growing as I continued kissing down her neck to her amazing breasts. She moaned in pleasure while I sucked her.

She moved herself back and I could feel her wet heat as I entered her. We kissed as she began rocking slowly. I looked into her eyes and it was like I had never seen her before. She was beautiful and for the first time I could feel a true connection to her.

I began kissing and nibbling her neck as I returned her thrusts in time. She leaned in and pressed her breasts to my chest as she cooed in my ear.

"Did Leera teach you that?"

She gave me a wicked smile, "she's taught me many things."

I knew I was getting close as I began to twitch inside her. Her walls gripped me tightly as if in response and I felt myself on the edge. But as I began to moan she separated herself from me.

"It can't be fun when you're only using the one, right?" She lay on her back and spread her legs seductively. She took her fingers and opened herself. "Use them both, in here."

"Are you sure you'll be okay?"

She nodded as she began to pant. I could almost feel her excitement at the thought of it.

I ran my hand along both shafts and leaned down on top of her. I pressed in, slowly at first as she wrapped her legs around me. She began pulling more and more of me inside her as tears formed in her eyes.

I gave her a moment as I reached her inner limit.

Her endorphins kicked in and she began slowly moving her hips. "Move! I want to feel you pumping me!"



I fought the tightness as her muscles clenched around me. I looked down and I could see myself moving inside her as she pulled me down and we let our tongues play. I could feel myself about to finish again as her legs began to shake. She sucked my lip into her mouth and bit it as I began to empty myself inside her depths. Was she learning from Nex too?

She wasn't far behind me as her moans turned into cute wimpers. She dug her nails into my back and locked me inside her with her legs as I continued to fill her with seed.

I lay there on her for a while as my orgasm slowly subsided. She continued to jerk as I sucked her breasts. "Stop, they're sensitive right now."

I stayed inside her as we mated until we were tired and I collapsed on her. She ran her fingers up and down my back while we both basked in each other's warmth. I allowed myself to slip out and to my surprise my seed remained.

I looked up at her flushed face and she smiled back down at me. "I will have your child. I've earned it now."

In that moment I felt that old familiar warmth running through me and I knew she was my mate. Before, it'd been only by Leera's insistence, but now I wanted her. I loved the feeling of her skin, and the sincerity of the emotion she now showed.

I was finally able to appreciate her and feel a bond.

The twins responded to my feelings and I placed them back at her entrance. "How about we go for twins?"

She laughed, "I'm new to this flesh world of yours but I don't think it works that way."

I leaned forward, brushed the hair from her face and whispered in her ear, "Why don't we find out."

## Chapter 33: Return To Camp - John

Fura's new bark armor once again covered her, though if it was a part of her doesn't that mean she's always nude. No, now's not the time to think about that, I should be drained after what just happened.

I walked over to Fernando. He deserved better.

I used Soul Steal but nothing happened.

"Master... Insects don't have souls." Mors said in a sad voice.

I scooped up what I could of his crushed body. He had protected me in the tunnels, and allowed me to finish merging into a fighting form. Without him, I would have died. Hell, when I think about it, I may never have even gotten in here to save Fura and my followers. I can't just leave him to be a stain on the floor.

I fleshcrafted him back together and circulated his blood.

He began to twitch, then crawled around.

"Fernando, better?"

"Fernando, who?"

I felt a lump in my throat as the warm liquid flowed from my eyes. "Fernando, you."

I wiped my face. "Belly rub?"

He rolled over and I rubbed his little stomach. He doesn't remember, but I'll make sure he has a good life.

Fura raised my face and kissed me. "You looked sad."

I smiled back up at her as she pulled me to my feet. We held hands as we walked over to one of the stone walls. She put her hand on it and it opened up.

Thrall's stinger struck out towards her. I pushed her out of the way and it sunk into my shoulder as he injected his venom.

I winced as the flesh of my arm began to slough off.

I grabbed his stinger with my good hand. "That's it, I'm taking this thing away from you!"

"My liege, stop I didn't realize she was no longer an enemy!"

"The whole us holding hands thing might have been a clue."

Fernando skittered down my arm and onto Thrall. He began trying to bite and sting him, but he couldn't get through Thrall's bone exoskeleton.

"Kill, cannot"

I laughed as I Helped Fura up. She smiled at me and I walked back over to my old body, which was still seated in the rotting chair.

"Thank Fernando, without him I would have fleshcrafted you an ass then shoved your stinger up it."

Come to think of it, I didn't give Thrall any reproductive organs. Maybe that's why he's so sting happy all the time. I think even bone devils have them, maybe he's frustrated?

I opened my chest and transferred my core back into my dense body.

As I regained control, I moved my arms. This body is too cumbersome. I like having all the condensed flesh for transforming and weaponizing myself, but carrying it around all the time will slow me down when doing day to day tasks. Not to mention I'm going to have to eat a horse's worth of meat everyday just to maintain myself.

Now that the threat seems to have passed, I may need to rework things.

Fernando skittered on the body I had just shed in distress. "Queen, dead!"

I don't know how I feel about being called a queen.

Bob laughed.

The hell, does he somehow understand, or does he just do that periodically.

Fura entered the room with her hands raised. "I am myself."

Bob looked her up and down. "A shame, I was hoping I'd get to fulfil my promise from the cave."

I threw a piece of rotting meat at him.

He caught it in his mouth and swallowed. "That trick doesn't work forever Boss."

Threscia came over and picked up Fernando.

I smiled sadly at her, "I promised him you'd give him all the belly rubs he could take."

She tried to rub him, but he skittered away from her finger. He just kept repeating Queen dead.

"Something's wrong with him, what did you do?"

I leaned forward and Fernando crawled on my hand. "Queen, alive!"

Great, I'm a queen now.

"Call me, John"

Threscia tilted her head, "I thought you hated my minions?"

"I do, but this one's different."

I reached up and put him on my shoulder. Well, I can't sit here forever.

I sat up and dragged my other body over to a pile of dead animals. I need to remake My followers.

Actually, I guess I can't use this body because someone stung me! I shot Thrall a dirty look, he looked away and seemed to be suddenly interested in cleaning his nonexistent fingernails.

This whole experience has really taken it out of me. I looked at Fura, she smiled at me and blushed.

At least there's one good thing that came of it.

"Alright Mors, let's remake them. Make sure to ask them if they want any modifications. Oh, and show them the fight with the creature, and Fura's reactions afterwards."

Mors took control of me and as I merged them she shaped them. Soon the three of them were in front of me, whole again.

I can see the boy wanted some extra muscle and to my surprise, red hair. The girl is too young for that cup-size doesn't she understand that she still has growing left to do. The mother stayed the same.

I used blend and infused their souls.

Fura walked over and looked on in concern. "What if they hate me?"

I held her close, "then those are demons you'll have to face. But I have a feeling they don't."

The boy was the first to open his eyes. He bowed his head to her, "I'm sorry for making fun of you. You don't have to be sad, I don't blame you." He rubbed his shaggy mop of red hair. "That thing wasn't you and I could see you suffering. Why else was it crying when it looked at us that first time."

Fura held her hand over her face as she sniffled.

The girl opened her eyes next and Fura looked at her nervously. She smiled back at her, "I was asleep through most of it, but John showed us what happened. Thank you, even though you always kept your distance from us, and we teased you. You still cared."

The mother opened her eyes last and pulled the two children in for a hug. "Thank you both!"

Fura hugged them all and I left them alone for a minute as I walked over to stand with Threscia.

She gave me a wry smile and punched me in the arm, "You and Fura seem to be hitting it off now, I guess that not all that screaming in there was from fighting."

I laughed, "Nope."

She looked at the goblins and Fura as they began laughing at something.

"I can see why you do it. Maybe there is something other than grief left in this world."

I felt a pat on my shoulder and Bob stood beside me. He began to squint, then looked back and forth between the young gob girl's chest and me, cocking an eyebrow.

"It was her idea, I swear."

"Damn Boss, I thought I was supposed to be the creepy one."

Threscia laughed, "You're both the creepy ones."

"Come on everybody. Let's get the hell out of here, and Thrall, try not to sting anyone on the way out."

We walked to the entrance and passed by a few more corpses than I remember seeing in the early rooms. I guess that not all the animals were dead. I was relieved that there were no more of my followers to restore, I guess my daughters protected them as they waited.

The ice had been removed from the hole and Fura raised her hand, widening the opening and lifting the floor to raise us out.

"John!" Liz leaped into the hole and hugged me before noticing that everyone was looking at her. She cleared her throat and straightened her shirt. "We got everyone back along with the supplies that they salvaged. Red ordered everyone to pack up and return to their units in case you wanted to move on. I agree with him, no one feels safe here anymore."

I nodded and pulled her in for a kiss. I can't help but want to embarrass her, even though I know she'll take it out on me the next time we mate.

I broke off our kiss and whispered in her ear, "thank you for being so reliable."

She began stuttering something about preparing and leaped out of the hole.

"Well Bob-"

"Are you going to kiss me too Boss?"

"No... I was going to ask if you were ready to return to your normal self."

Bob laid down by the pile of meat he shed to enter and I fleshcrafted him back together.

I jumped out of the hole and helped everyone else out.

"Where's Thrall?"

Threscia pointed at a tree, and I saw him struggling to pull something out of it. After all the times he's almost killed someone I need to keep a closer eye on him.

"I think he's trying to pull out that pickax I made earlier."

Threscia handed me my macuahuitl.

"No, you keep it. You can be my knight."

She smiled at me, pulled me down and kissed my cheek.

"You can be sweet sometimes. Now, I'm off to find Roscia!"

I watched as she waved and ran off. It's good to see her happy for a change. She was getting weird there for a while.

I felt a soft hand on my chin followed by soft lips. "I'm going to go cuddle up with Leera for the night. You're welcome to join us!"

I looked into Fura's sultry face as her orange eyes met mine. That was English!

"Wow, what happened? You can speak now."

"It's because we got closer. The more connected I feel with you, the more of you I absorb."

"Absorb how?"

She gave me a mischievous smile, "come cuddle with us and I'll show you."

Bob shoved his prehistoric muzzle between us, "Okay, doll, I'm in!"

She stifled a shriek as she fell back. I moved forward and grabbed her hand, pulling her into my chest.

I sighed, "Bob, she's my mate. Stop harassing her."

He laughed, "Well if she won't scratch my itch then I'm off to find Muffy."

"Muffy? Wait, no. I don't want to know how that name came about. I can already guess there's some sort of slayer joke coming and I can guess what she slayed."

Bob laughed and with a gust of wind was gone, leaving Fura and I alone.

She closed her eyes and tilted her head as I leaned in and-

"My liege! Might I keep this weapon?"

I shot Thrall a deathglare, but he seemed oblivious.

"My liege? Well, I guess I can go put it back in the tree..."

"No, keep it, but in exchange don't attack any of our people for any reason."

He nodded and laughed a deep laugh as he hugged it to his chest and stroked the bone handle.

"I'm adding a rule to the no attacking one. Never do that in public again."

He nodded and walked off while whispering something to his new weapon.

I felt the cold night's air on my chest as Fura separated herself from me. "I'll be going, don't be too long or we'll start without you."

"Wait, open the hole back up again. I don't want to waste all those bodies."

She waived her hand and the hole expanded as the ground became steps leading down. We smiled awkwardly at each other for a moment before she left.

Now then, there's a few things I'd like to work on.

First, I want to optimize this body, carrying around all this flesh just doesn't work in non-combat situations. Second, I need a new weapon, and third, we need to make up lost time somehow.

It's not that we're on a schedule, it just pisses me off knowing that town still stands after what they've been doing. I can't help but feel a sense of helplessness while I stand here knowing that with each passing day there might be another victim like my daughters... And the dark god hates feeling helpless. I can feel him writhing inside me.

I heard a rustle in the trees and activated dark shroud and life sense.

I expanded my legs as I ran to give me more speed and used stalk to get behind whatever it was.

"Dad, I know you're there."

"Oh, it's just you Athen. What are you doing out here?"



"I'm watching the hole in case something comes lurking out."

"We pretty much cleared it, but there's a nice bit of meat in there that I have plans for. So the only thing you're likely to see lurking out is me."

He laughed, "Well at least you're wearing pants this time."

"Yeah, sorry about that. I must be a shitty father."

He smiled at me, "You're not bad, just embarrassing."

He climbed down the tree and stood in front of me. I forgot how tall I made him, he's quite an imposing figure and he's diligently working behind the scenes to keep everyone safe.

I still remember when he was just a little guy with twinkling eyes. Goblins sure do mature quickly. I need to do something for him and his men to reward their efforts.

I held out my hand and he gripped it as I pulled him in for a hug.

I used fleshcrafting to give him full body Galvanism.

"That was weird. What just happened?"

"How do you feel? Try moving your arms."

He flexed his arm several times, then his dagger appeared and disappeared from his belt to his hand. He began ejecting his spikes with enough force and speed that they made woosh noises and I felt the air coming from them.

He looked at his arms again and I saw his eyes sparkling in the early morning light.

There's my boy, I'm glad to see he hasn't lost his sense of wonder.

"This is incredible!"

"Yeah, I thought you might like it. Send the rest of your men by and I'll give them the gift as well."

He hugged me in as he ran off shouting, "hey look at what I can do!"

Yep, even though I didn't really raise him, he's mine alright.

Time to work on this body. I walked back down into the... What the hell should I call this place? I guess I'll call it Fura's warren.

I gathered up a few loose wolf and bear parts as I made my way to where I had abandoned my improvised body.

I need a way to keep all this flesh around me, but not attached to me. If I just made like a flesh backpack I guess I could literally carry it, but then I'd look like a skinned ninja turtle. Maybe there's a workaround that I'm missing.

"Old Queen, dead, sad."

Ah, I forgot he was there.

"Not queen, not dead."

I looked from Fernando to my old body. There's an idea. If I compress things together inside a bone casing like I did when I was in my centipede form and made it sentient it could be self sustaining and just follow me around.

"Fernando, want, upgrade?"

"What, Upgrade?"

I'll take that as a yes. With this I might be able to kill two issues with one stone.

"Mors, we're going to make a giant Fernando to store my extra flesh for when I need it."

"Yes Master."

"Which is better, chitin or bone?"

"Chitin is flexible, but you're going to need bone to condense things as much as you're wanting to."

Fernando is a multi-sectioned insect, with eight legs and some long prehensile pincers and massive venomous fangs. I'm thinking that if I enlarge each section I can store a large amount of flesh and bone which he'll maintain himself. If I section it correctly, then I should be able to fleshcraft it off of him without harming him in the slightest. I just don't know how well this will work considering a bug's anatomy.

"He'll need regular lungs and an improved circulatory system to maintain that size. I would also recommend using a hydraulic movement system in tandem with his normal muscles to support the additional weight."

"Thank you Mors, let's begin."

## Chapter 34: Cavalry - John

After we finished fleshcrafting Fernando into his new form, he was the size of a large dog. I gave him all abilities, including Galvanism, Asexual Reproduction and Mimicry.

I hadn't played around with Mimicry yet myself, but I believe it's what the stone was made with and what fura used both for her plant outfit earlier and her bark armor now.

It seems to be limited to natural objects.

Another bonus to upgrading Fernando is that I was able to give him a normal mammalian brain. He wasn't exactly smart yet, but he will learn.

We could also now communicate through the Coercion ability. Meaning that we could send each other images and small fragments of recent memories if I looked him in the eyes.

I thanked Mors and Fernando and I walked outside and into the early morning light.

I found one of Athen's men just hanging around and ordered him to get some people and go fetch the rest of the meat to replace our lost food supplies. It may be rotten, but we don't need to worry about that.

Now for phase three. I need to increase our mobility.

I looked at the horse corpses.

I could just mend them and send us off that way, but that didn't seem practical, and I had already used a few of their bodies and my men had already eaten a few so logistically it wouldn't work. I would have to fit three or more men per horse, which would effectively reduce our forces to one third and would cause us to have to scurry off our mounts and into formation when trouble arose.

No, each person needs their own mount. The problem with that is that I only had thirty-one horse souls and twice

as many men.

For some reason Liz and Nex come to mind. Maybe I can convince some of the ranged to become centaurs. If it's limited to one group then it would be okay if they carried a person on their back they could also carry multiple quivers in their saddlebags effectively eliminating the need to run to Leera's group to grab ammo.

This wouldn't really work with the other groups, and if I made a mount for the Oni then I would quickly be out of parts.

I'm thinking that for Leera's group a beast of burden would be better as they shouldn't be actively involved in combat.

Athen's group wouldn't really be effective anymore with mounts, and The Phalanx would need something they could dismount quickly so they could form their shield wall.

Wait, maybe I'm not thinking clearly. If I use the animals from Fura's Warren as crafting supplies rather than just food and If I completely consume all but the linguistics from the enemy souls for the non-frontline mounts then I should be able to pull this off.

I'll make a small, reverse jointed large horned horse for my group and the elites. For Athen's group, I'll make a large agile creature, maybe a panther. For Leera's group I can make a heavy creature like a rhino that can be loaded down with supplies, and I'll have Blue build a cart.

The only remaining problem is the Phalanx.

Come on, think!

I looked at Fernando, and gave him the mental picture of a shield. He crawled up my body and latched onto my arm.

"Damn Fernando, what have you been eating?"

He sent me back a mental picture of the animals from Fura's Warren.

"That was rhetorical."

No he was at least two-hundred pounds, no one could make use of him as a shield. So that option is off the table.

I sat him back down and he rolled over. For some reason he still likes his belly rubbed, even though I'm pretty sure he can't feel it through his bone exoskeleton.

"Yes he can Master. Those hairs give him feedback."

"Good, Mors! Maybe you can help me figure this out."

Mors and I spent time bouncing ideas back and forth but in the end there was nothing I could think of...

Wait a minute, maybe they don't need a mount if I modify them to carry themselves in some way.

I looked at Fernando. I'll convert their existing legs to use the same system Fernando's legs use, and I'll give them one additional set of smaller reverse jointed legs behind them. That way their mobility will be greatly enhanced. They can also use that extra set of legs along with the grip they offer to help them brace for impact in battle.

It would be great if they agreed, maybe I'll ask Blue his opinion first.

I spent the rest of the day on modifying my men. To my surprise more than half the ranged agreed to become centaurs likely because Liz's power inspired them.

All of the Phalanx agreed, but I expected they would. They were a tough group and had amazing mental strength. The only stipulation was that in times of peace I was to change them back. Of course for Bob this meant that both his lovers would now have four legs, he didn't seem to mind though, in fact he got a little excited.

I also gave Athen's group Galvanism as a reward.

I then got to creating all the mounts. For my groups mounts I made the goat horned horse creatures, but I added a reverse joint to their rear leg. I also opted for layered chitin instead of hair and massive carnivorous teeth as I was giving them a ghoul's stomach.

I used the trained Warhorse souls for these mounts because I didn't want them to flee in battle. Warhorses were trained to work on the frontlines and were used to combat, perhaps even more than my men.

I talked to Athen about making the large panther but he declined my idea saying that with galvanism his group didn't need it.

I argued that they would be no good to me if they were tired but he said they needed to build endurance anyway.

My son is a spartan bastard. I just hope there isn't a coup when they learn he denied them cool panther mounts.

I looked at the parts that were left. I guess it's better to save some for supplies.

I heard soft clanging and Threscia came walking up to me in a full suit of plate armor.

"Blue's modifying the armor to fit everyone. He says it's mainly for his group, but" She stopped mid sentence and stared at Fernando. "Is that Fernando!?"

"Yep, he's my weapon bearer now."

She began playing with him until one of my men rode by on his new horse-goat-dragon thing. I really need to name these things. Hor-go-dra... Eh, it'll work.

"What the hell is that?" She said as she stared at it slack-jawed.

Ha, I expected this, "it's a horgodra."

She yelled for the man to come over and she inspected his horgodra. "Is that chitin?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Where'd you find all the bugs for it?"

"Bugs?"

"Yeah, Mors told me I would have to eat bugs to make it."

Should I tell her it's basically made out of the same stuff as hair, but with a little calcium thrown in?

"Master, please don't. I was just a little angry with the way she was bossing me around earlier so I may have withheld some information but she really can form chitan from eating bugs."

I tried to keep a straight face as I asked, "Threscia, have you been eating bugs?"

She turned red and I cackled inwardly as Mors joined me.

"N, No!"

I pointed to my teeth, "You got a feeler stuck right about there."

She ran her tongue along her teeth, "Did I get it?"

I smiled, "You have!" I couldn't hold in my laughter anymore, it's great when I'm not the butt of the joke for once.

The next few seconds where a blur, but I now know what it feels like to be hit with a Macuahuitl.

I fleshcrafted my arm back together as she stormed off.

I looked around our camp. My men were getting used to their mounts and modifications and Leera's group was packing up the left over supplies.

Oh yeah, I need to make them a mount or two and get blue to build a wagon.

I dragged all the human bodies together since no one was using them at the moment and crafted something resembling a stocky compact rhino with chitin armor in critical areas. I used the same callus tissue that I used on the Oni and broke my usual pattern by making this one an herbivore. It wouldn't be good if it wanted to eat what it was carrying.

I created one more and used blank slate souls to fill them in.

I whistled to one of my men and they came over. "Take care of these things for a while. I'll be back soon, just don't let them run off."

Even if they were blank slate souls I gave them a basic brain, which Leera could control with coercion. The downside here is that, that meant she could no longer ride with me.

I walked to Blue who was busy bending and reshaping armor with his hands. I never considered that he could use his strength like this.

"How's it going Blue?"

"Busy."



Now that I think about it I don't think I've ever exchanged more than a few words with him.

"I made some beasts of burden to transport our supplies. Is there any way you could squeeze making a couple of wagons into your workload?"

He stopped working and looked at me. "Yeah, it shouldn't be an issue." He reached behind him and pulled out a strange piece of armor.

"I noticed you seem to dislike armor and I thought you could use this. It's reinforced and modified with the chains from your box. It'll at least cover your heart."

He handed me a double thick piece of plate in an inverted pentagonal shape with Ralphus's chains to secure it.

I put it on, this is perfect, I'll still be able to use my fleshcrafting. The chains seemed to remove all weight from it so it was almost like wearing cloth.

"I'm impressed Blue! Is there anything I can do to repay you?"

"You've already saved me twice and I am honor bound to follow you. I wouldn't ask for anything else."

I nodded to him and he returned to his work.

Everyone seemed to be busy or tired. Leera was showing Healer how to do his job, while also helping her group to finish packing. Nex was hanging out with Reginauld her family. Liz was busy training with her new mounted units and Red was keeping everything organized.

I don't give Red enough credit. I definitely wasn't the best general. I just did whatever I wanted. He was the one that held our army together in that last big battle. At some point I need to reward him.

I walked around and checked in with everyone to see how things were going. Ralphus and Lil'sis were training on more spells as Languoria and Thrall watched.

That's right I promised to show her a few of my spells. I called out to Lil'sis and she turned accidentally whip in hand

and accidentally cut Thrall in half as Languoria dodged back.

I ran up to mend Thrall while he clapped and shouted "Good show!"

I mended him and began showing Lil'sis Dark Tendrils and explaining channeling. She was a natural, and after a few tries her spell was almost exactly like mine.

I wanted Thrall to teach her a few spells as well because I lacked most offensive spells and Dark Blades was shitty. It moved at a speed of maybe five miles per hour. You could almost literally run around it, add on top of that it's outlandish mana cost. I debated teaching her barrier but I wasn't overly familiar with it myself and my version was wind attuned. The rest of my offense was corpse explosion, but Thrall can teach it better than I can.

I looked for Thrall and saw him and Ralphus gushing over Fernando who was loving all the attention.

"Thrall, time to keep one of your promises and teach my daughter some death magic. Make sure to show her how to cancel it as well I don't want her unleashing a plague."

As my men trained, and blue worked on the wagons and armor I decided to pass the day hunting with Fura and Lina.

We had a little much needed fun in the forest and managed to bring back a good haul of rodents and edible plants to add to the food stores.

I was able to talk to Lina. It seems Leera never told her what happened when she died during the battle. I guess it will be a burden that Leera and I will bear in her place. But every time I see Lina's innocent smile a part of me cries out at our loss. I don't think I can keep this secret forever.

I looked at all the food that the three of us managed to bring back. It was maybe enough to keep a family fed for three days if they ate three times a day. In a way it just makes me angrier at the human town. Why can't they just do what we have? Would they really rather eat their own children than rodents, or are they just inept? Maybe they're

scared of something and too afraid to venture out of their town. Well, I'll give them something new to fear when I introduce them to the concept of karma. The good ones will go through the same training I gave to my berserkers. The bad ones will be torches, but all of them will suffer.

That night there was a surprise waiting for me when I went to my improvised tent.

All my mates were there, none of them were wearing any clothes.

Leera had Fura bound with her hands behind her back and her knees together as she licked her feet.

She leaned forward and gestured me over provocatively. "She told us about everything. She said you forgave her, but she still wants to be punished."

She gagged Fura with a piece of cloth and spread her ass. "You need to fuck her here and don't hold back! She wants to feel everything."

She licked her fingers and inserted them slowly into Fura's waiting hole. She added fingers slowly until three were inside her.

Fura moaned in protest but the way she was moving her body to take in more showed how she truly felt.

From what happened earlier I already knew that Fura loved large penetrations. The thought of having something huge inside her turned her on, and I was more than able to accommodate her.

Leera removed her hand and Fura's ass gaped and contracted as the stimulation stopped.

I readied myself at her anus and entered her with both members as the rest watched with keen interest.

I slapped Fura's ass each time I thrust in and she let out a muffled cry as she clenched around me.

I reached forward and pulled her head back by her hair as I began slamming into her.

Leera bent forward and removed Fura's gag and placed her mouth between her legs. I could feel Fura begin to

tighten on me and I knew she was about to cum so I stopped and gave her ass another slap. She said she wanted to be punished, so I'm not letting her finish so easily.

Each time I slapped her I could hear another muffled moan from between Leera's legs.

Leera herself began to moan as her legs turned to jelly. She let out a contented sigh, and Nex came forward. She put Fura's mouth to her dripping sex as her eyes glowed.

I can tell they had this planned.

Leera approached me from behind and whispered in my ear. "Tonight she's our slave. Don't let her cum!"

I felt Fura clenching once again. She was loving this. I stopped and gave her a hard slap as she let out a frustrated groan.

Nex lied down and I released Fura's hair, letting her face rest on Nex's opening. Soon Nex joined Fura in moaning as she began arching her back in time with my thrusts.

Fura's muscles pressed desperately around me as Nex came. I had to pull out before I came as well. Nex moved and Lina lay down in her spot. I took a deep breath and forced myself back into Fura. The second I was buried all the way in she began to contract around me. I pulled back out to see her ass opening and closing as she shook.

Lina wrapped her legs around Fura's head and they both came together.

"I didn't say you could cum yet." I reached down and untied Fura's leg bindings as I pushed myself back inside her hot hole and pulled her back on top of me.

I lay my body back and ordered Fura to ride me as Liz stepped up.

Liz's face was red and she covered her mouth with her hands. "W... Would you, please eat me?"

She was shivering and seemed uncomfortable but I'm willing to bet there's a sadistic smile under those hands.

Fura began to ride me as her muscles continued to twitch around me letting me know that her orgasm hadn't finished.

With one hand Liz ground Fura's head against her, and with the other she clutched her breast. Fura cried out in a mix of pleasure and pain as I felt something cold coming from Liz's hand. She had coated it in ice.

I looked at Liz's face to see a look of enjoyment as she watched Fura suffer. Fura had sensitive nipples after coming and the ice made it that much worse.

Liz forcefully rubbed Fura's face against her and soon Fura was releasing cries of pleasure again. She slammed herself down on me and raised up slowly letting me feel her. Liz finally began to moan and I couldn't stop myself from cumming anymore. I pumped every drop deep into Fura as she moaned at the sudden full feeling.

Liz dropped Fura's hair and came with us.

I reached up and untied Fura's hands and she fell back on top of me.

We all fell asleep in our usual way and I savored the feeling of having them all pressed against me.

I awoke to Blue clearing his throat. He walked over a rhino harnessed to a large cart followed by another one. It was a strange sight but a welcomed one. It meant we were ready to go.

## Chapter 35: Riverbrook - John

With my improvements in place we were able to travel at a good pace and hit the original bandit camp at around mid morning. My torch garden was still in tact.

I distributed the torches among my men. They serve as a good light source and also seem to repel predators at night.

My daughters held strong. It seems that the suffering they endured has softened a bit. Wendy wanted to keep Lenny's head for herself. It seems that he was her murderer. Though she smiled tears still fell and all I could do was hold her as she told me what he did. As my heart broke it took a massive amount of willpower not to fleshcraft him a new body and kill him again.

After we loaded up the supplies and bodies we were off again. I had Wendy ride with me on Bob.

Bob did his best to cheer her up and soon she was back to her giggling self. We told jokes and sang songs from our world and as day turned to night she seemed to cheer up. That is until we reached her town. I jumped off Bob's back and helped Wendy down.

Wendy frowned "Riverbrook..."

We had approached from the road. Though the rhinos could trample their way through a forest, I didn't want to break any wheels so we took the easy route. I didn't care if anyone saw us because soon they would know why we were here.

I had Athen's group and the Phalanx surround the village. It was a loose net, but I didn't expect any real resistance, after all these were cowards that preyed on their own. They would probably turn back at the mere sight of one of us.

"Bob, fog this place up."

Bob was gone a heartbeat later and a thick fog blanketed everything.

I ordered my berserkers to break into each home and bring each person here. Their eyes lit up as they activated Life Sense and charged into the fog.

I gathered my daughters behind me Threscia stood with Roscia. I brought Belairia and Lil'sis to stand with Wendy beside me. They would be the judges here.

Belairia looked at me nervously, "You won't kill them all will you?"

"Yes, but only the guilty will remain dead. The young will not be punished, nor will the ones who were innocent. But I have a suspicion that the innocent ones are long dead already. I'll rehabilitate those that I can but only after they're put through what you went through. Bob could only bring back your head, it's entirely possible they've already eaten your body. These aren't people who deserve mercy."

I heard the shattering of wood followed by startled screams as my men ripped people from their homes.

Lil'sis balled up her hands, "Sis, I know you didn't see it, but our parents knew. They closed the door behind us and let them take us. They let them kill you."

Roscia spoke up. "They've been eating us. And that jerky that they feed us... Those were our friends."

Belairia gagged.

"Because they were eaten, I can't bring them back. The children they killed are gone forever."

There was a gust of wind and Bob was back.

"Boss, hop on, I need to show ya something."

I hopped on Bob's back and a half minute later I was in front of a damaged shack.

"Look in the tent."

I opened the flap and peered inside. There were bodies strung up like meat. A young female body, what looked like a mangled man's and a skinny woman. They had been

gutted and their limbs severed, sat aside to smoke by an earthen oven.

"I recognize the man's body, I tore him up good. That means the girl's body is more than likely..."

"Yeah, I figured but who's the woman?"

They weren't the only ones though. There were scraps here and there from people with smaller frames as well as a pile of bones in the corner.

"That's not all, take a look at this."

Bob led me to a small clearing behind the shack. My heart sank, there were carved wooden plaques sitting on mounds of earth with names on them. I dug up the one that looked the freshest. Judging from the hair it was a boy. He was already decayed, but you could still tell by the shortness of the hair.

I used Soul Steal and got Soul of a Brave Boy 71%

It was so fresh. Maybe just a few weeks old. I dug up the one behind it and got. Soul of a Shy Boy 52%

I kept digging and found three more viable souls the rest were no longer able to function.

I clenched my fists, I hate this feeling. It's like I'm watching someone drown, and can't move to pull them up for air. It's a feeling of loss. I know I didn't kill these children, but I also know I can't save them.

I reburied the heads of the children that I couldn't save. Their souls were already inside me, but they would never be themselves again.

I will try feeding them blank souls and bringing them back as infants. I think that will work, at least what's left of them will get another chance at life.

I took the five heads of the children I was able to save and hopped back on Bob.

We returned to the rest and I was greeted by a large group of panicked villagers.

I nodded to my men and they nodded back. "That's all of them God John."



They had them surrounded in a circle like sheep surrounded by wolves.

I had my men plant the torches around them as I sat the heads of their children down in a row in front of them.

I called out to one of my men to bring me five bodies from our supplies.

I waited patiently for the villagers to stop crying and screaming as they ran around like lemmings, or huddled in groups.

It seems like they haven't noticed who's behind me yet. No I imagine they haven't peeled their eyes off my men for a second.

I ordered my men to back off and open the front to me.

I activated Soul Steal and Life Sense as I approached them. A few of them squealed and one woman passed out, only to be trampled by the rest as they struggled to break through my men to escape me.

"I bet you're all wondering why you're here. You probably have questions like what is this thing in front of me and what does it want. No, I'd imagine you're just wondering if you'll die tonight, and how bad it will be. Well, fear not. I won't touch or harm a single innocent. So only the guilty should be worrying now." I said in Therossian.

They were all still panicking but that was about what I was expecting.

"Separate the children from the adults and take them to the supply wagon. Make sure to give them bread and cheese, they don't need to see what comes next."

The children were all injured. They had been stepping on them and thrashing them around in their attempts to escape. I mended each on as they kicked and screamed. They didn't know I wanted to help them, but considering what I was about to do to parents, perhaps hating me was the right choice.

"Big sis! Rosha!" A girl cried out, followed by a boy. They were young, and their words were garbled but their faces lit

up as they ran to Threscia.

Threscia and Roscia hugged them as they all cried together.

"Mommy told me you were a princess and Rosha was coming to stay with you! She said we couldn't play with you anymore..."

There were two people in the crowd of villagers who were trying desperately to fight against the mob.

"Everyone be still! The next person that moves dies!"

The crowd stopped and I parted them to reach the two that were trying desperately to get to me. "It's okay you two, come with me."

From her long brown hair I could tell who the woman was and from his fierce sad eyes I could guess the man's identity as well.

"Threscia! Roscia!" The woman cried out.

I grabbed both their hands and pulled them out. As soon as the woman saw her lost daughters she fell to the ground in a heap. The man picked her back up and I guided them to their daughters.

Threscia looked at them coldly. "We're not your daughters anymore. You don't deserve to be called parents. I know you knew what would happen to us. I know, because I knew when you sent me! Then you had the gall to send Roscia. Do you have any idea what they did to us!"

The woman broke down again and the man spoke up. "We knew, but we had to do whatever we could to save our family. We sent you so we could have money for food and we sent Roscia so she wouldn't be next to be..."

The woman spoke between sobs, "I didn't want to send either of you! I wanted them to take me... But they wouldn't let me."

The man's eyes lit up in anger. "What did these creatures do to you!" He held his fist as if he would punch me. "What did you do beast!"

Roscia stood in front of me, "He saved us from where you sent us! He took us in and taught us how to fight and he punished the ones that hurt us." She gestured to the torches. "He's a god, and he's my true father. All you did was keep us alive, then sell us off. We could have ran away, even if we died in the forest somewhere we would have died together instead of you sending me to die alone. I didn't die, but the rest." She gestured to my other daughters and ended on Threscia. "They died. They tortured us, raped us and killed Threscia."

The man looked at her, confusion plastered on his face. "But you're both alive and you've returned!"

Threscia called out to Leera to take her brother and sister to the wagon. "No father, I died and this man saved me. You killed me the day you sent me off. Now go back with the rest of the town, that's what you chose above your family so tonight you'll share their fate."

I held hands with Wendy as I guided her and the sisters to the front of the crowd.

There where a few gasps as some people recognized them. The ones with the biggest reactions were a couple. A tall dark man with thick black hair and a petite woman with raven locks. The other two surprised me. There was an older balding man, and a tall muscular man. I think I found the ones who clubbed them that night. But if the two were Belairia and Celairia's parents and the two men were the assailants, then where's Wendy's mom?

My mind shot back to the woman's body in the shack. I didn't see it's head, but it may be Wendy's mom.

I kneeled down, "Wendy, go back with Fura for a minute and talk with the other children by the wagon."

She looked at the crowd, then back at me. "Where's my mommy?"

"I'll find her, you can trust me."

I saw her start to tear up. "None of that now, you're my daughter and you have to be strong for the other children."

Show them my girl who survived against monsters in a dark hole. Show them what it takes to keep on living."

As Fura took her back to the wagon I grabbed Belairia and Celairia's parents and brought them to the front.

"I bet you didn't expect to see your daughters again, at least not whole."

The man face contorted in anger as he took a swing at me. I caught his fist and crushed his hand like putty. "These are your daughters! They are amazing outgoing girls with so much left to show the world, but you threw them away. You killed them twice, for what? Because others wanted you to? Because you were too weak to oppose the social norm. Your anger is misplaced. You don't deserve to call yourself their father."

He cradled his mangled hand as the woman fell to her knees. "Please you can have them, just don't hurt us!"

These people sicken me. "Oh, I do have them, because you failed them. Do you think cowering and pleading will save you. The only thing that can save you now is if they tell me to spare you."

I looked to Belairia and Celairia. Belairia's eyes were misted over and Celairia had a look of pure loathing but neither spoke.

"Your daughters are stronger than you'll ever be. Get back in the crowd, I have no time to waste on you."

I shoved them back with the rest as I brought the assailants forward. "Girls, are these the men who promised you food then knocked you out?"

They both nodded then Celairia spoke, "They weren't the only ones though. That man's the village head." She pointed to an older man with white hair.

While the rest of the village was dressed in simple burlap and tweed he was wearing a purple coat and layered vest. He had a gaudy golden medallion and a well groomed beard.

I felt the bile rise in the back of my throat. These are the men who dared to touch my daughters. The ones who ripped them from their homes and deprived them of their family. I looked at the village head as I exhaled fog. This man, this fucker dresses like this while his people starve. I have no doubt he was taking a cut from Thads for sending girls, he reeks of corruption.

My body responded to my will and my muscles swelled. Fernando instinctively joined me as I returned to my dense form. My teeth grew sharp as the black liquid poured. I felt the dark god's eyes upon me. He seemed to urge me on. His only wish was for me to rage and them to die. The more they suffered the better. He craved cruelty, and tonight I would give him his fill.

I reached into the crowd as they shrieked and dove out of my way. I grabbed the village head and dragged him to the front. I ripped off his gaudy clothing as he screamed and fought, then used fleshcrafting to bind his wrists and ankles together. I drug him to a nearby house and hung him by his feet from the eaves with his own thick golden chain.

He rattled off things he could give me, followed by apologies. I turned the bone in my hand into a jagged blade and as he pissed himself I slit his throat.

I left him there convulsing as the town looked on with horror.

"Do you find it hard to watch? This is what you did to your own children!"

The two men who had done his bidding were now shaking as they watched my every movement.

Dark Tendrils.

They screamed and pulled at the tentacles as they struggled to keep their footing.

I don't want them running away before I'm done.

"And the two of you, I think you can guess what happens next."

I savored the look of terror in their eyes as I stripped them and bound them with their own skin.

They soon joined the town head on the eave and as they struggled I opened their jugulars and let them bleed.

A few of the towns people were retching.

"What's wrong? They're just live stock to you people right? This is what a human looks like when you treat them like meat." I gestured to the men as their dying nerves caused them to jerk around.

I walked back to the town head's body and fleshcrafted off his head. I grafted it to my hand and opened my circulatory system to get his blood pumping again. I used Soul Steal then infused his soul back into his head.

His eyes opened wide and his mouth opened in a silent scream as tears flowed down his face.

"Do you know who's body that is?"

It looked at me in shock as realization flashed in its eyes.

"That's right, now witness what happens."

I cut his body down and began skinning it. I then ripped it into sections and individual portions.

"Form a line! The ones who don't eat are next." I yelled to the townspeople.

They just stood there like statues, all were afraid to move.

"Fine. Next!"

I grabbed a man from the crowd and began to strip him he pleaded and soon he joined the others on the eave.

"Eat!"

They rushed the pile of meat and each got a piece. I held my hand up so the town's head could watch as his people devoured him. I looked at him, his eyes were shut tightly.

"No no, I can't be having that." I fleshcrafted his eyelids off.

"You're getting to share in what you've done to others. It's a rare chance, and believe it or not." I turned him to one

of the torches. "Compared to what awaits you, this may soon be a fond memory."

He bit off his own tongue. I mended his injuries. "You're not in your body anymore. That's in your people now. There is no escaping this, all you can do is take it all in and ask yourself what brought you this end." I turned him to my daughters as the villagers finished the last scraps of his body.

"It seems like they really were hungry. I'm almost willing to bet that if I looked in your house I would find something other than human meat wouldn't I?"

His mouth opened and closed again as his bloody tear streaked face stared at me. "Oh I'm sorry, you no longer have speaking privileges. You're just meat now and tomorrow just like each day before it, you'll be shit."

I separated my hand from his head and impaled it on one of the Phalanx's wooden spears. I infused his soul back into it and watched him burn.

The villagers took notice and began looking at all the torches.

"Yes, death is the easy part. They're all still alive in a way, but all they can do is burn silently, screaming for mercy that will never come."

I brought the spear in front of them and drove it into the ground.

"Now who's still hungry?"

I butchered the other two men and let them watch as the town ate them. A few villagers were vomiting as others cried. Their loved ones I suppose. I couldn't help but to wonder if these men ever butchered their own families or just the rest of the town. I'm assuming they didn't and now for the first time these people are feeling what everyone else felt.

"Is everyone full?"

They all just stared at me, most were frightened, but a few had looks of disgust or rage.

"Come on answer, or I'll feed you again."

They all nodded and gave broken replies.

"Good, have you ever heard the expression fattening the sow?"

Their eyes shifted gradually from confusion to fear as they began murmuring amongst themselves.

I used weakness and dark tendrils as they began a chorus of screaming.

I took each and fleshcrafted their hands to their knees as I moved them into a circle.

"Girls, you should leave for this part. You don't need any more nightmares."

Belairia and Blondie left to join Wendy, but Celairia and Roscia stayed.

"Are you sure you two don't want to go? This won't be pretty."

Celairia swallowed hard and nodded slowly as Roscia spoke up. "They fed me my own friends, and where going to do the same thing to me. Whatever you do these fuckers deserve it!"

Roscia's father yelled out from his spot on the ground. "You can't mean that! We tried to save you by sending you away."

Roscia walked over to him and Threscia followed for support. "We should have left together! I killed a fucking bear in the dark with a dagger and you wouldn't even brave the woods in broad daylight!" She looked up to Threscia, "You knew Threscia died and you sent me anyway. You're as guilty as the men who tortured us."

Her father fell silent and began sobbing with his wife.

"Alright, it's time to begin." I fleshcrafted my hand into a bone club. "And each of you remember, if you think what you're about to go through is bad, what you put your children through was worse."

I walked around the circle and bashed their heads in, then brought them back only to do it again. They all



screamed when they knew it was their turn, but after it happened enough they just sat there and accepted their fate. Weaklings, they really are like livestock.

I unbound them and took the last man down from the eaves. When I infused his soul he cried and clung to my foot. I stomped his head until the contents of his skull spilled onto the ground, then mended him. I did this until he no longer fought or cowered.

They all stayed sitting even though they were free. I guess this is what happens when you lose your fear of death. It was something that at first is weak, but as time goes on grows stronger. When faced with the prospect of their doom, they acted desperately to avoid it until it became an obsession that ruled their lives. They showed the grossest parts of their weakness all in some vain attempt to delay the inevitable. And now, when they were forced to face that fear, then forced to overcome it, it seems like they lost all reasoning.

They had paid so much just to avoid death, that when it's no longer a concern they simply don't know what to do anymore.

"Tonight, you paid for your sins with your humanity. Now stand and form a line."

They all obeyed without a word. A few of the men from my group chuckled and commented something like he was harder on us. I shot them a glare and then they quieted down.

I turned my attention to the five heads now with five bodies beside them.

"Come and watch. These were all I could save from the graves behind the shack."

"That's not all Boss." Bob handed me a woman's head. She had long copper locks tinged red by her blood. The eyes were sad the her mouth was contorted and blue.

"I saw her last time. That's Wendy's mom, she was still in the shack. I found it while you were playing psycho-killer of

duck duck goose."

I turned to the people and held out the head. "Why did you kill her? You already had two bodies?"

A man with a thick mustache stepped forward. "We didn't sir. She hung herself a few nights ago. We just didn't want her to go to waste."

I nodded to the man and looked back down at her head. Finally, someone who showed some damn remorse.

"Very well, get me another body."

As my men left to fetch it I used Soul Steal and closed my eyes.

I spoke with each of the five children. They all had mostly normal lives up until they were offered a midnight snack from the shack. It was strange, when I asked them about their parents and how they got along, most admitted that something changed a few years ago but couldn't describe what. They just felt like everyone was livelier and more motivated then.

I opened my eyes. "Mors, you know what to do."

As we finished each body I added all abilities and infused their souls.

Five boys huh. It's almost like they send the girls off to be tortured and butcher the boys here. Subconsciously they had to know they were eventually going to make themselves extinct. In a world like this one a village of elderly people isn't too likely to survive. Even if I had never came here, in twenty years this place would have been a ghost town.

They looked at me, and at the people line up. "It's okay, go to your parents, then go get some clothes from the wagon."

They all rushed to their parents as the embraced each other in tears. All except one boy who just walked up and down the line calling "Mom, dad."

A few of the villagers began to break down as they watched him. I saw one woman openly sobbing.

"Woah, come here little guy. Are they not here?"

"I.. I don't see them... Where are they mister?"

I looked back at the villagers. "What happened?"

The mustached man stepped forward again as he dried his eyes. "I'm sorry sir, the old head made a rule."

I don't like where this is going. "What was the rule?"

"If anyone tries to leave, we kill them. The boy's parents... They didn't go easy. But we're not killers, we're not good at it. It took them a while to die."

The further in I dig the more rotten it becomes.

"What about their heads? Why didn't I see them when I was digging?"

"The graves are for the parents to visit their children. There was no one to visit them so we used everything."

I held the boy as he cried. "I'm sorry."

He hit me with his fists. "Bring them back!"

"I... Can't."

"You should have just left me dead!" His cries where like screams as he pushed me away and ran towards the forest.

"Stop, it's dangerous!"

Moments later Liz was in front of him. She scooped him up and he buried his face in her chest as she walked him back to the wagon.

I stared at the mustached man. "You seem to know quite a bit about what's been happening here. Why is that?"

"I was the village head until a couple of years ago. That's when the Duke sent us that fella you had us eat. He didn't know how to do anything, so he asked me allot of questions."

Another piece of shit tied to the Duke. I'm starting to get a clearer picture of what's been happening here. But what would he have to gain from all this misery and how far does it spread?

Well, this town is mine now and from here I'll expand. This foolish Duke didn't value his people, but I will. I'll make

them mine, and I march an army of his victims right down his throat.

I looked down at the last body. It's time to bring back Wendy's mom. I wanted to punish her too, but perhaps she's had enough.

"Mors, fleshcraft, English."

"I'm not Fernando Master."

"Sorry."

We finished quickly as I added all abilities and infused her soul.

She opened her eyes and immediately began sobbing. "My daughter, I let them take her! She's... She's..."

"She's over there."

She let out a squeal as she stared at me. "A Devil!"

"Okay, well, satan says go to the wagon."

She screamed and sobbed like a track on repeat until I picked her up and carried her to the wagon.

"Mom!" Wendy called out but her face went from happiness to anger.

"Lillia!" She ran to embrace Wendy, but Wendy pushed her away.

"You're not my mom anymore!"

Wendy's mother fell to the ground and began crying. Wendy watched for a while before her lip began to quiver and she hugged her. "I'm sorry Mommy!"

"I'm sorry too baby! My sweet baby you're alive!"

I'm not sure how to feel right now. It's touching, but does that woman really deserve forgiveness. I'll watch her as time goes by. If I ever see her put her needs above her daughter's then I'll give her the same treatment the other villagers got. But for now, I'll leave the two of them alone.

I still had one more matter to attend to.

I returned to the long, jumbled line of villagers.

"Tonight, you shed your humanity, and with it your weakness. Do you really want to be the people you were yesterday? No! Step forward and join me. Together we will

rebuild this place from the ground up, starting with you. You will no longer live in fear of darkness and death. You will prosper in it. We will kill the Duke and take his domain. We will grow stronger, and in time you may be able to hold your heads high again and be proud." I held out my hand. "Come, it's only a little death before you start your new life."

DeathCreator Book Two: The Dark March - End.